Sulfur 9

FEATURING NOTEBOOK PAGES, LETTERS, AND TEXTS BY
ANTONIN ARTAUD Δ SIX HAIBUN BY
JOHN ASHBERY Δ SIX POEMS BY SUSAN HOWE
JED RASULA ON HELEN VENDLER

FAYE KICKNOSWAY

SHE WEARS HIM FANCY IN HER NIGHT BRAID

Exploring the nature of birth, courtship and female consciousness, this major contribution to the 20th-century long-poem genre challenges the way we think about ourselves as men and women. Six stunning drawings by the author complement this haunting poem.

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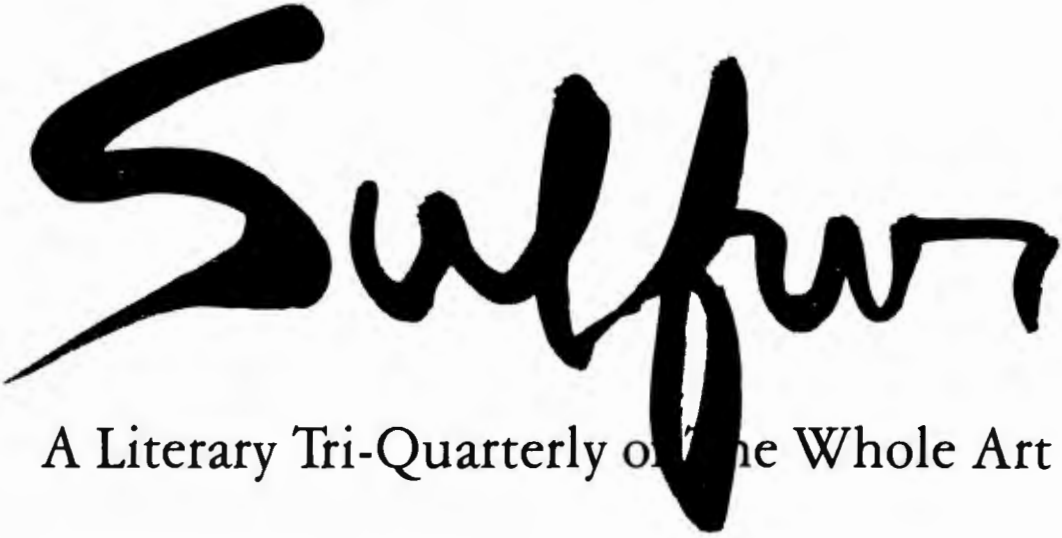

A Literary Tri-Quarterly of the Whole Art

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Selections from *Suppots et Suppliciations:* © Editions Gallimard 1978.

CORRECTION

The title of Octavio Paz' essay on Han Yu in *Sulfur 8* was mistranslated. It should be "The Wooden Hermit." My apologies: I caught the mistake after *Sulfur* had gone to press.

Even Kilmer nodded . . .

ELIOT WEINBERGER

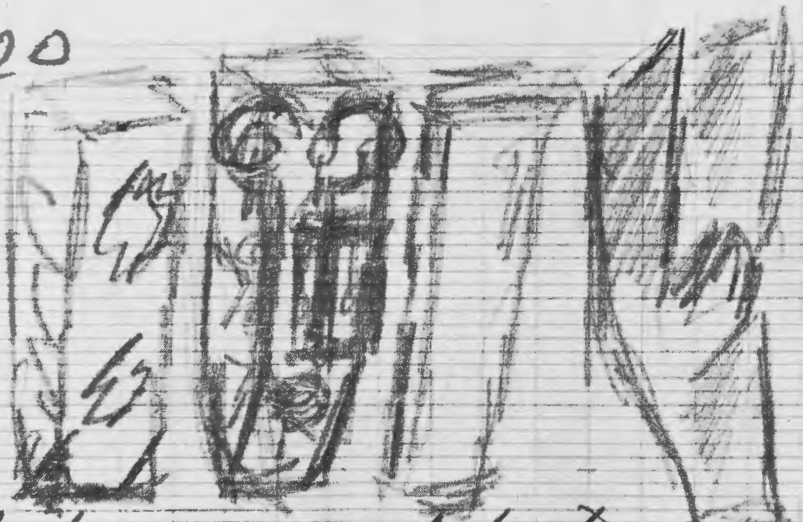
Photos: Jacqueline Hyde, Paris

A Note on the Reproductions from Artaud's Notebooks

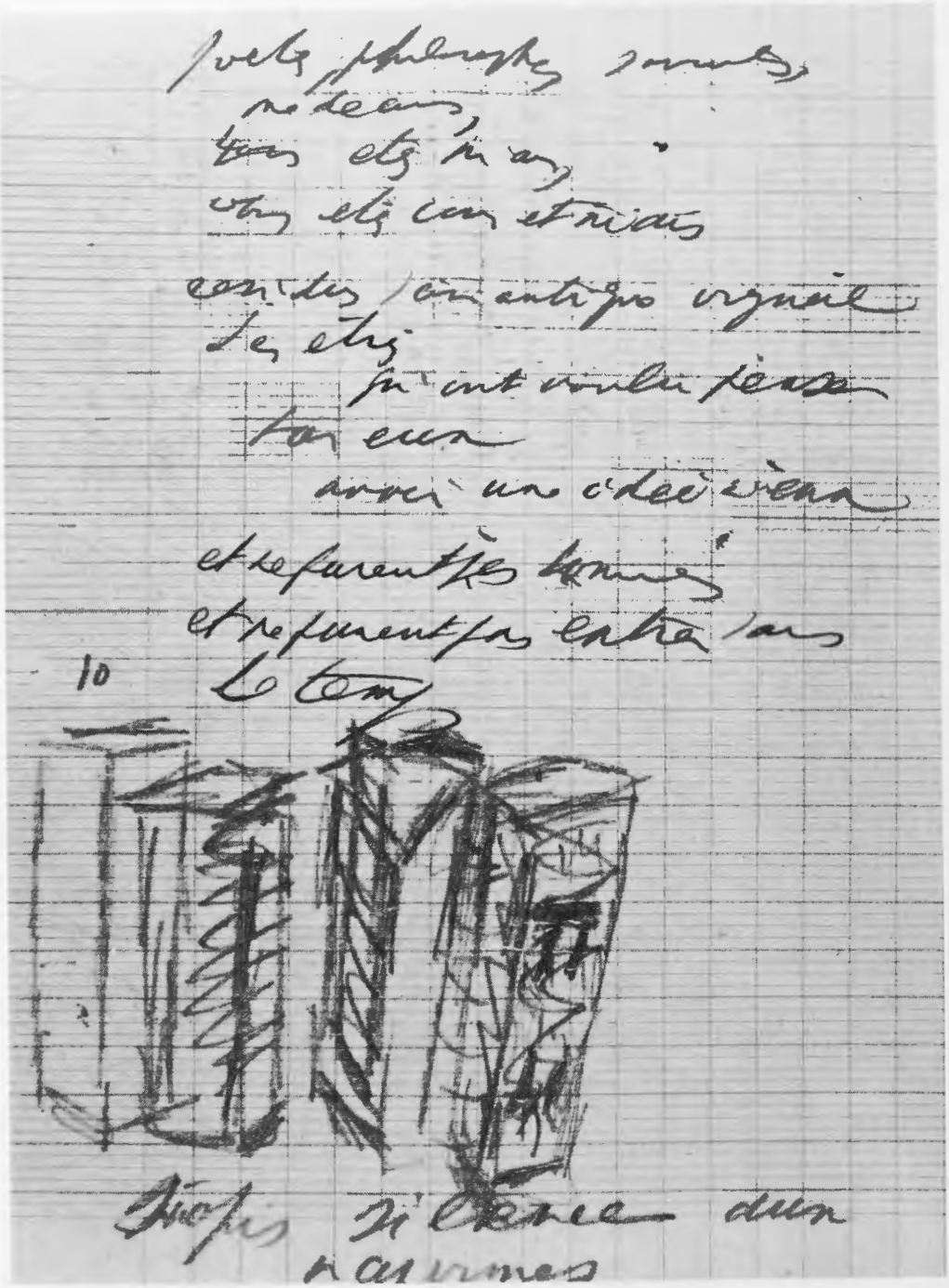
Antonin Artaud began to write daily in schoolboy notebooks in February, 1945. At first, only writing darkens the pages, crowding into the margins and leaving no areas untouched. He generally writes with a pencil. The first marks added to the writing are strongly emphasized dots, made by crushing the pencil lead into the paper. Drawings only appear much later, probably at the same time as the large drawings in color. The small drawings in the notebooks may have been Artaud's attempts to discover forms with which to fill unused spaces in the large compositions. From this point on, writing and drawing are entangled in the notebooks; in particular, there are many bodies and objects, such as coffins, gallows, blocks of wood, iron collars, clock faces, nails, screws and hammers. Artaud always carried pencils in his pockets during these years, though occasionally he wrote in ink. His stroke is so violent that he sometimes tore the page; at other times, so insistent that the drawings have an anthracitic gleam. The pages reproduced in *Sulfur* are extracts from different notebooks.

—Paule Thévenin,
Paris, 1983

20



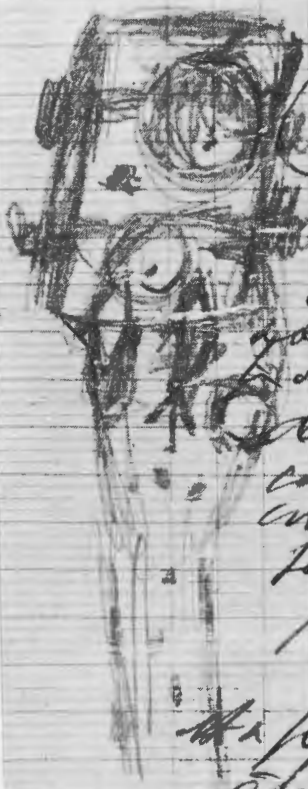
Le dessin avec les poètes, devant
et photographies sur
Devant dessin sur blog.
On ne cache pas un texte sous
ou le reste,
pour les idées
des autres.
On ne cache rien.
On ne cache pas.
On travaille avec notre
on reprend ce qu'un autre
PARLE TRANCHOIR



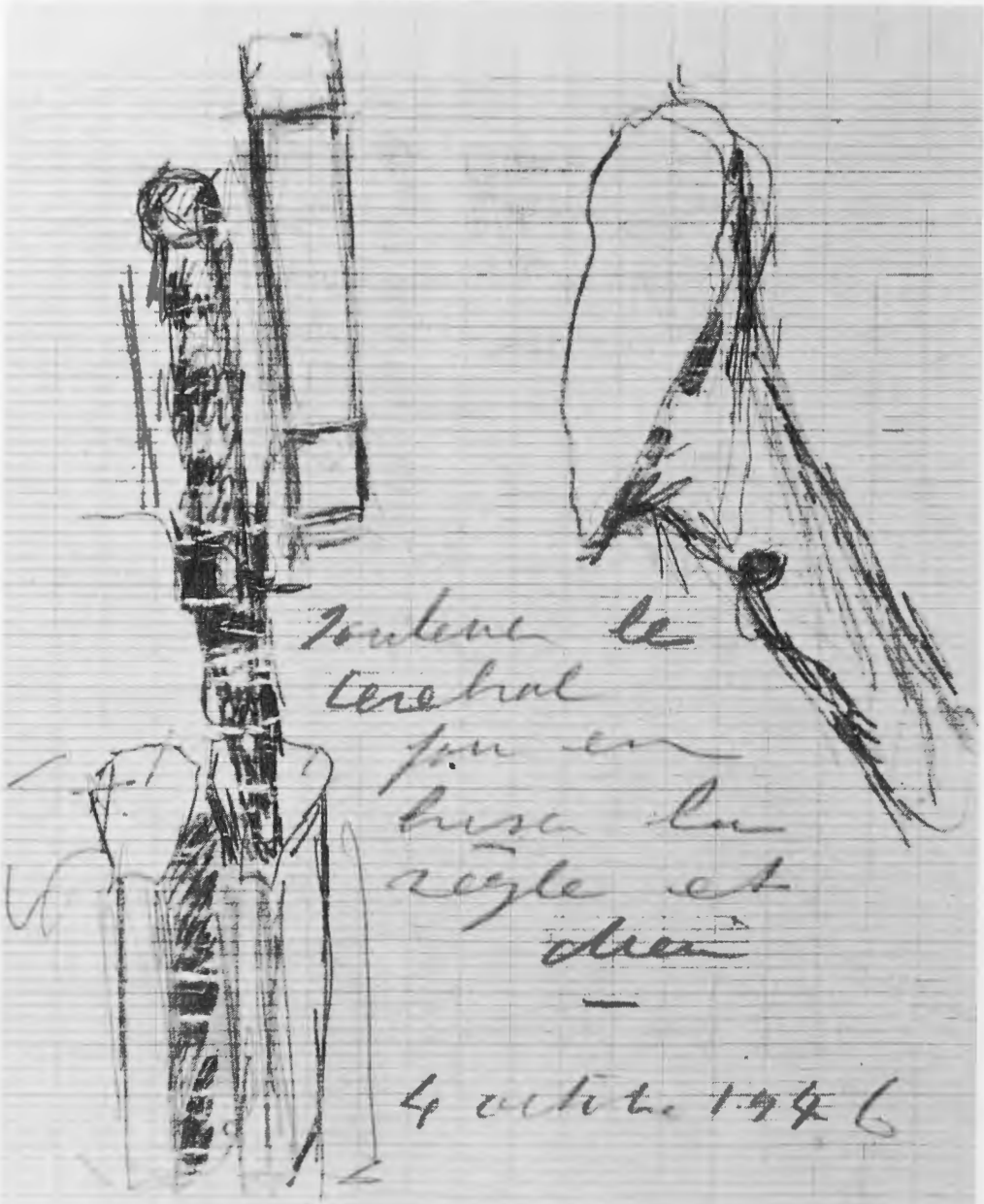
Cet homme ne savait tout faire
et pour cause, allez pourquoi des
fleurs toutes ses fleurs au néant.

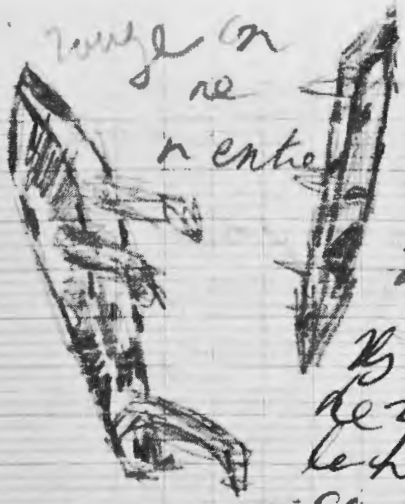
mes poèmes.

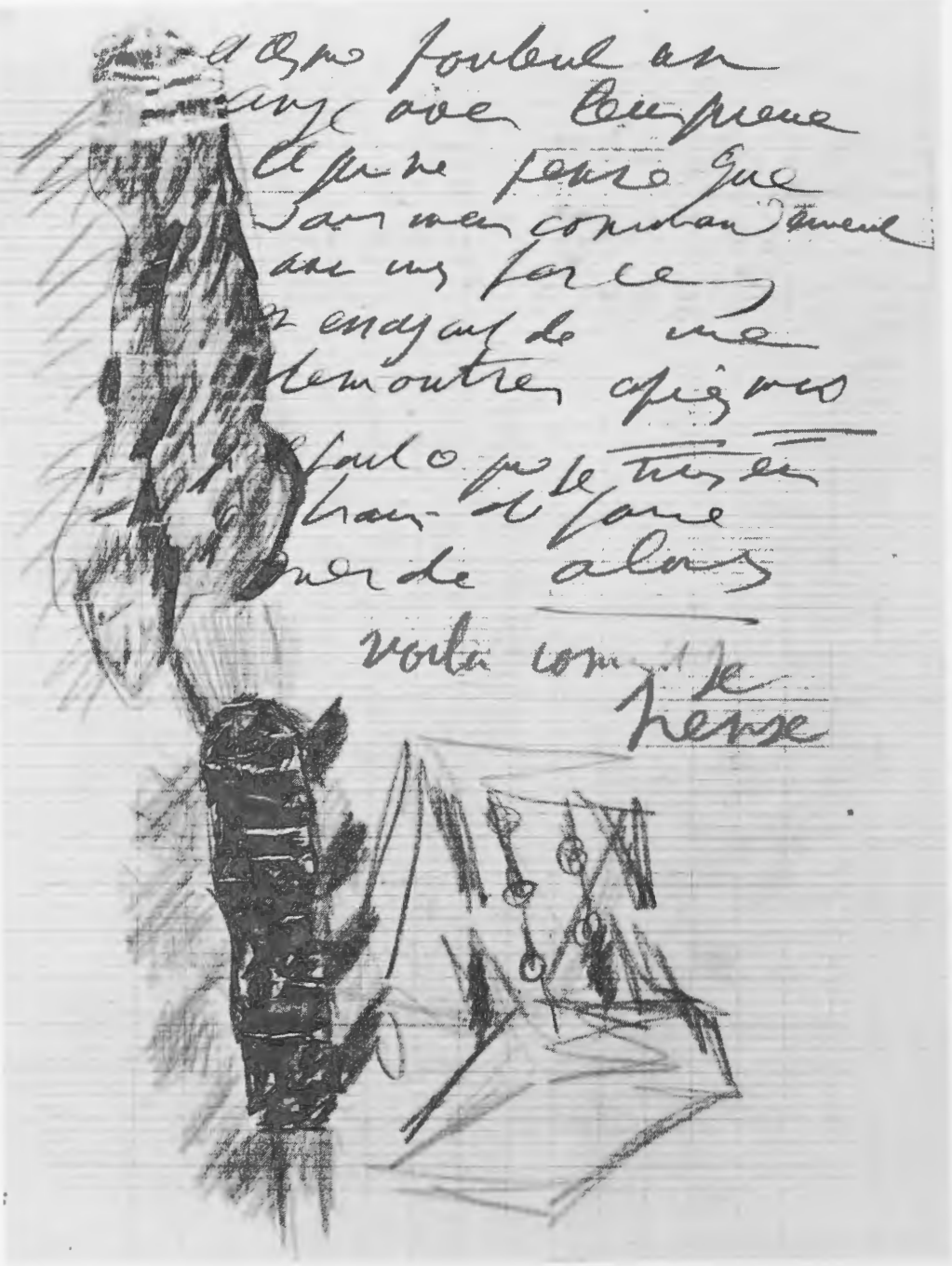
Le temps passe mais ne
revient pas c'est comme
et à bas les doigts mêmes
mes bras aussi
Cette idée m'épouvante elle
m'obsède toujours et
j'essaye autre chose.
Encore
Encore des mouvements on
ne cesse de s'en va
et le temps pour moi
et comment observer.
Je crois que mes yeux
pleurent mais les étoiles.

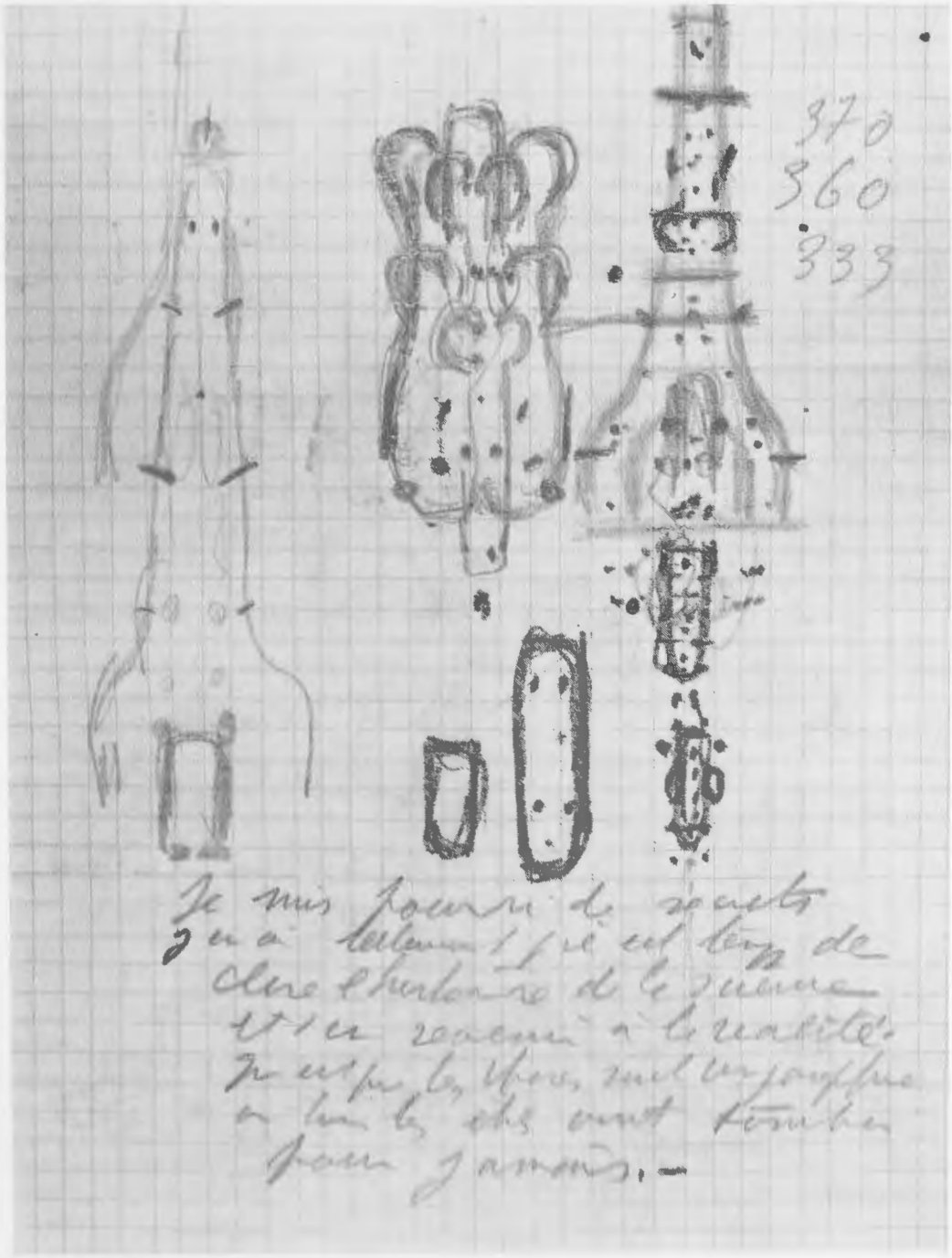


la mare
a da da ra da da
da dara
(a ta ta
ta ta ta ta (ter)
ta ta ra
a ta ta ute
oui je peux car même
que le temps jamais
n'oublie = Route de Paris
de l'Est
ça je n'ai jamais voulu
comprendre le titre par
par le grand et pas
par le fond
il n'y en a pas.
Mais lorsque j'agglomère les
choses à ma vérité à toujours
mes bons chevaux et mes chiens
pour les faire Dante
Ton Cloe
et minutieusement
ça à peine si les étonne tant :

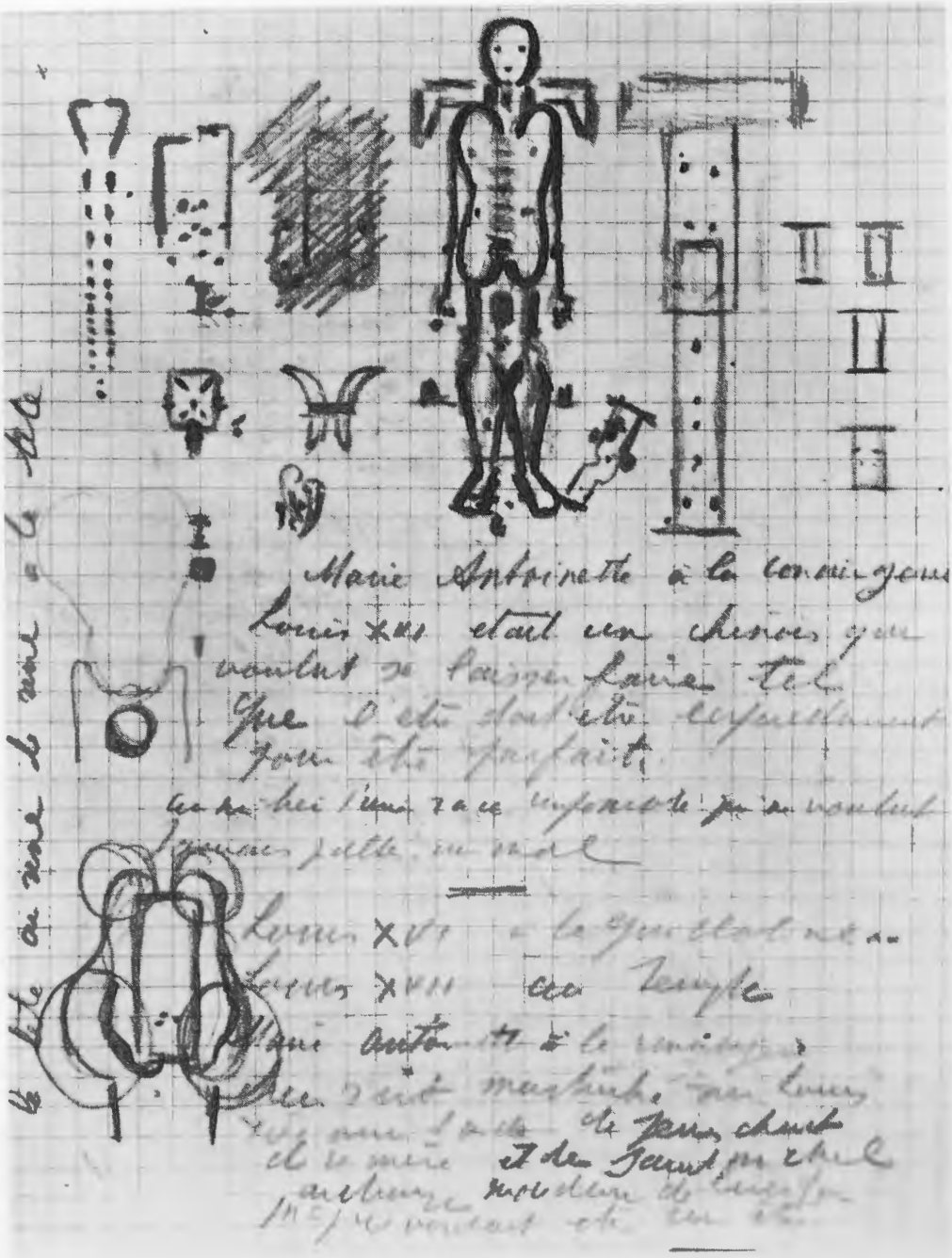

Toutes le
tenebres
font en
sorte la
regle et
dieu
4 août 1946







Je mis fourni de secrets
J'en a tellement j'ai eu tort de
dire Charlemagne de la guerre
et ce roman a la vanité.
Je crois les Hors, mal en groupe
a lui la clé ont tombé
pour jamais. —



Antonin Artaud

Selections from SUPPOTS ET SUPPLICIATIONS

This book is comprised of three parts:
Fragmentations,
Letters,
Interjections.

The first part constitutes a sort of breathless review of culture, an incredible cavalcade of the body through all the totems of a culture that was ruined before its incarnation (or incorporation).

In the second part, the suffering body that undertook this cavalcade discovers itself:

and it is quite clear that it deals with a man who is a man and not a spirit.

In the third part, there is no longer any question:

of culture,

nor of life,

but of that kind of inchoate hell where the man's body suffocates before beginning to breathe,

and which holds at the border of feeling as well as of thought.

And in the end I learned from the process that there is neither consciousness nor thought.

The universal bewitchments that have always aimed at the body in fact hit it in a region far beyond consciousness or ideas;

and it will be seen in this book that to effectively bewitch someone there is no need of special initiation,

but that it is enough to be as thoroughly low and criminal as any middle-class person of our time, so as not to hesitate at certain obscene bodily positions that universal hypocrisy cultivates on a reputedly moral plane,

the other being reserved for that superficial honesty that allows this thoroughly counterfeit, sick world to hang on a little while longer.

And it will become apparent, through the letters published in this book, that it is truly me,

my self, a modern-day man, who lived through this senseless adventure of being voluntarily bewitched by everybody because I had, on the cosmic plane, a body capable of sparking the most ignoble greediness.

Modern man is really worn out and you don't have to dig far into his ideals to understand that all he wants is to pump up his available life enough to go off his rocker and finally to go away.

So it is that between the fragmentations in the beginning and the incredible interjections toward the end I wanted to build a bridge of true correspondence

an exchange among some of the living so as to allow the reader to truly materialize the issue, and to furnish him, in the midst of that atrocious struggle, with the springboard to a life perhaps pathetic, but one lived by visible, feeling, malleable and coherent men.

And so it is that the drama of the interjections is clarified and moved from the plane of delirium where universal slothfulness of mind would be tempted to closet it, onto the plane of the living, watery, purulent struggle of a man with, upon him, the bodily suppurations of evil spirits, the authentic bourgeois of life.

(Translated from the French by A. James Arnold and Clayton Eshleman)

From FRAGMENTATIONS:

MOTHERS TO THE STABLE

Doors, cells, loft, meals. Was the room I had to pick a loft or a stable, a shelter or a jail?

Was I a man or a beast?

In this there was an inexhaustible world of thoughts to which, basically, I knew full well, I lacked the key; and these thoughts never made up their mind to surrender that key because none of them was really me, although the whole of what I was thinking was *in fact* made up of them.

So the doors of the rooms and cells in front of which I found myself quivered with anger with their locks and keys inside my heart, while in the real world they were all frozen in silence and a two-faced animality.

I'll open up as soon as you become like me. That's what every one of the locks leapt out of my heart to say, or so it seemed.

I was a man. But the doors with their locks of anger wanted to see me think of myself as an animal and at last own up to my own animality,

and that is what I could not accept.

Beware of doors, I thought. Not one seemed to offer safe passage. How was I to know whether it was a door opening into the prisons of this world, or out to eternal space?

Oh, if those rooms had only been as brightly lit up as that time on the mountainside when I opened the door of the immensity in front of me and saw infinity, without lock, without key.

But the time for that was now departed.

Why are we locked up too? the doors with their locks and keys kept groaning. We are all of what wanted to lock you up.

Give in! Come on, give in! We're all self-respecting because you are. But, come on, we're sick of being stuck that way and we all feel the same and hate your self-respect.

At this declaration of man's mutiny against my good will

a gong-like sound came ripping out of the clouds in protest, a sign that the last infinity had been bypassed, because the immensity herself was howling out

at the rape inflicted on her.

And I knew that the infinite is someone whose very size is without other measure than that of his will which has been crying out to high heaven ever since the hour this outrage began.

But why bother with all these doors of being and symbols of personalities, avenues of penetration? Am I the sky or the sea or the waves of the immensities I hear groaning in my heart like cattle in a stall, as I shuffle along in my bones inside this skin I am never going to finish reshuffling until my final hour?

Doors, I am not about to imitate your arrogance. I'd rather hear the sound of my own footsteps on this earth than be a rapist of eternities.

But the curse on life that enclosed me in the whims of ontology was a thing I never had the time to finish. Already I was a mere straw tossed on the roaring waves of all these women/doors and multiple-key locks that flew at me out of the *hypnotic* orient of things bearing me away into I know not what heart wherein I was immersed in the essence of Being.

At that moment a thought told me: These are the Mothers that let fly with their assagai wings in the ego of every man.

Thereupon I lost all sense of self other than "letting fly" and the human footsteps I had heard myself making on the earth which the earth had buried, having taken leave of myself with my skin and bones. I was nothing more than the intrusion of these women in whom every door was now rejected.

I'm free again! thought these tight-knit cohorts inside me. Free to be and embrace anything that thinks. Free, in other words, to mingle.

To know the happiness of being alive, you stopped standing there like a signpost, a post with four arms outspread against everything that tended to foam up like a wave.

Things aren't going to be the way you thought or intended, things are going to be the way they like, in opposition to your crazily uncompromising position. You can't live without animality.

Well, it's been only too long since I've been acquainted with that point in the meningeal jelly wherein the human will has jelled, and the abominable ways it has been put through the ringer by a mutinous inner essence, to be fooled by all these false ideas.

The unprescribable I SHALL of the ego is not all alone at that point in the brain where the individual, personal soul conceives itself. No, there are others in cohabitation with it and these work tirelessly to its detriment.

Before I had the time to decide for myself, I was dispossessed by the being known as "living."

That is how the Mothers raped my thought.

Wave upon wave, they break over me from all the points of their filthy desires, until the day they go broke, broke as life's Manifest One.

Before the livestock in the loft and the lock on the stable door, I recognize the battle that comes back in every dream between the Manifest One and his Mothers, and the Non-Manifest One along with his reincarnations.

Sisyphus pushing his rock back up inside the mind has no more *reality* in dreams than the scream of this frightful HERE LIES, in which He (who no longer exists in real life and has to reincarnate in order to exist at all) caused me to recognize Him in my dream when the Mothers repulsed me in real life.

The inaccessible infinity of reincarnation tempts Being much, much more than just simply being, since surviving by means of reincarnation means by-passing one's being when this being is being suffocated by life. Living means time, a given period of time. Surviving by reincarnation means that (by the refusal of the time to be) one never takes leave of this eternity of non-being in which the Celestial Intelligence, or Mind of life's Non-Manifest One, is victorious.

But right here (I said to the dream Mothers at the instant of awakening) *here*, and soon, we shall see life exist.

(Translated by David Rattray)

From LETTRES:

TO JEAN DUBUFFET

Rodez, 29 November 1945
My very dear friend,

Yesterday I took the liberty of entrusting you with a letter for René de Solier whose address I don't know. Do excuse the imposition, but I knew René de Solier was worried and I wanted to reassure him. Because, my dear Jean Dubuffet, things are not as they seem in everyday life. The universe in which we live is an unfinished universe, where someone who exchanges greetings with another in the street is actually—once at a safe distance and with the blinds drawn—the envier and enchanter of that other because he thinks that other had more genius, mind, personality, soul, and physical density than himself and so he sets about to ravish him of his very being and mind by whatever means it takes to encompass such an end. This was not widely known until recent times but has nowadays become a fact that no one is unaware of, although the whole force of universal villainy and crime is still working hard to prevent it from being publicly acknowledged. For a long time now, Jean Dubuffet, these operations have no longer been individualized, on a small scale and confined to a few private individuals practicing black magic in the privacy of their own homes. What I am talking about are public operations in which the entire population of Paris, the countryside and the fields of France are taking part, in Paris, under the influence of waves of enchantment being beamed from Afghanistan, Turkestan, Burma, Bengal, and Tibet.—And the *masses* of all the Catholic churches on the planet serve as a back-up to these enchantments which at certain moments sweep through and suffocate every mind like yours, Jean Paulhan's, René de Solier's, all my friends' and everyone else's who like yourself and me wish to defend our personality against the intrusion of the lower-middle-class greed of priests, merchants, government employees, typists, working people and that whole revolting vomit of villainy, jealousy, egoism, and stupidity that makes up the whole of mankind and gathers at all hours of the day in groups in the streets of Paris, on the steps of churches and cathedrals (St. Augustine's, Notre Dame des Champs, Notre Dame de Paris) as other

populations are gathering in the streets of Delhi in India or on the slopes of the Himalayas, etc., etc. I needn't hide from you the fact that I myself am the target of all these enchantments. Their secret aim is to make me lose my personality and mind, as well as to lay hands on my body and replace it with a soul other than my own, one that is just as cowardly vile as that of all other beings, i.e. given over to any and every compromise—which is idiotic, asinine, gross, and moreover filthy. I can't begin to fathom what fluke of moronic viciousness led every human being on the face of the earth, or just about, to seize on me as a focus for their unclean desires, and suggestions, to be vile, dishonest, dirty and without honor or mind, just like them, but it's a fact, and day and night I have around me an obscene horde of recriminatory jackels, enchanters, and soul-masturbating succubi and incubi, and these succubi and incubi are not the demons of Martin Schongauer or the elder Brueghel but Monsieur Durand, Monsieur Dupont, Monsieur Cop, Monsieur Priest, Monsieur Abbé, Monsieur Monk, Monsieur Doctor, Monsieur Rabbi, Monsieur Imam, Monsieur Bonze, Monsieur Brahman, Monsieur Lama, Monsieur Everyman, et cetera. Due to this state of affairs every one of us is suffering, and all the more so in that it is being protected by the Police which is 100 per cent at the beck and call of the enchanters, with the exception of a handful of policemen who resigned out of disgust.

You are not unaware that I, Antonin Artaud, am the same Artaud who in 1917 led the population of Marseille in a 2-day uprising to put an end to this state of affairs, following which all the bourgeois and their newspapers nicknamed me Saint Tarto, as in tarte à la crème, tartine (= 'butter-bread') or petit tantinet (= 'trifle').

In 1927 there was an article in *Nouvelles littéraires* with a box at the bottom of the page devoted to Saint Tarto, to ridicule him, following a battle against the Police that had happened at Place Blanche, in which André Breton (him too!) had fought like a madman, but that battle hadn't happened only at Place Blanche, it had broken out in every sphere planet-wide, because André Breton together with several Surrealists including Pierre Unik, Marcel Noll, Jacques-André Boiffard and, I think, André Masson and Roland Tual, had observed that we were being enchanted and had seen in the very streets of Paris a group of women with their skirts pulled up beaming their obscene idiotic magical sex-waves at us. Your show wasn't understood in 1925 or '27. They didn't understand the genius of a drawing isn't in its technique but in the action of the forces that presided over the calculation of the shapes and signs that the drawn lines

abandon, lend shape to, empty out, make one miss; and which it often requires more than mere genius to discern. From where I stand, I am gunning for the enchanters, whoever and wherever they may be—I can see them with my breath and certain wrestling holds inside my enchanted body because the enchanters do not recognize signs, but this state of affairs has got to stop and souls with a heart like yours and mine must get to breathe.

All the best.

Antonin Artaud

P.S. now that you know my whole story and now that, between 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. today, November 29, 1945, we saw each other from afar, and you helped me sing, and we sang together and saw each other again as we once did in the garden of Gethsemane and in front of I forget what cloister of the past, I can't hide from you the fact that the means by which they are torturing me are also being inflicted on the handful of persons whose addresses I gave you. The aim is to prevent them from coming to me. Also, you have seen all 6 of them—Catherine Chilé, Neneka Chilé, Cécille Schramme, Yvonne Chilé, Ana Corbin, and Anie—and you won't be in any doubt, either, that all six of them are really and truly my own daughters.

Cécile Schramme, as Paulhan told me, did in fact die in 1940 and after an estrangement, we were reconciled a short time before her death, but her soul came back in a young girl who knows me backwards and forwards—her name is also Cécile but she can't come to me either;

another of my daughter-souls, a young girl by the name of Neneka Chilé is a young Afghani of 20 who translated *L'art et la mort* in Afghanistan and left Afghanistan more than a year ago but has not yet completed her journey to join me;

another—and this one is my eldest daughter Catherine Chilé—was a nurse at the Hospital Saint-Jacques. She left Paris in May 1945 and has not yet arrived here;

as for Anie Besnard, it's more involved. I have learned that she had left Paris to join me on October 14, 1944, with supplies for me. I saw with my own eyes how she was ambushed en route and was murdered and her dead body pulverized and scattered to the winds, and to cover up this disappearance and murder, the Police which is the police of the initiates replaced her with a double to whom

the initiates gave the memory of Anie Besnard in real life, which explains why Anie Besnard, knowing that I am in the most extreme want and having received money from me before I left for Ireland, has not even taken the trouble to send me a note since your visit to her, because I noted that the writing wasn't my friend Anie's hand.

My dear Jean Dubuffet, I have an account at the Bank of France. They caused me to forget that it was there, being covetous of the money, however, I have just remembered it. I request you to demand immediately that the entire amount of my bank account be turned over to you because I need it to finance my trip to Tibet and support my family until we get there.

P.P.S. Friends from Ireland will be of assistance to you in taking possession of this sum in gold bullion. It was brought back to me from India by a friend.

TO MADAME JEAN DUBUFFET

Rodez, 29 November 1945
Dear Madame and great friend,

I wanted to thank you specially for having been so affectionate and thoughtful as to send me butter, sardines, and fresh coffee beans, which shows you understand that it was the absence of fats in my diet and my state of undernourishment that occasioned the state of disarray in which the minds of all my friends may be found at certain hours of the day when they are swept up in a wind of panic raised by the operations of obscene enchantment on the part of certain monks in the Himalayas and the populations of Burma, Bengal, Turkestan, and Afghanistan. Also, at given moments the people of Paris and other French cities join in with these hate-filled dissociative maneuvers which take place at certain hours *under the protection of the police*, as I told you.—This abominable state of affairs has got to stop, for if—as you know—I hate Jesus Christ, I also hate the Antichrist, who was never anything but his henchman and a creature of his enchantments. I went to Mexico—to a mountaintop at 5,000-odd meters—in order to put an end to certain Christological operations of what magic whereby black magic in its entirety was always fomented both directly and in a spirit of contradiction, as well as by yet another spirit to whom

whiteness was ever anathema. Therefore I shall go, and I intend to go immediatly, to *Tibet* in order to finish this frightful task. But to do that I need a cane which I prepared expressly for the purpose, and its missing prototype is that cane of St. Patrick with which I traveled to Ireland and which is now in the hands of this so-called Anie Besnard, 45 Quai Bourbon, who is no more than a double, since the actual Anie Besnard was murdered sometime after October 14, 1944, the date on which she had taken the train from the Gare d'Orléans in Paris to come and join me here.

My history is not that of the Prophecy of Saint Patrick which you know since you read it in the Dictionary of Hagiography published in 1894, of which there was a copy on the shelves of the public reading room at the Bibliothèque Nationale in 1934 when I read this prophecy for the first time. Therefore my history is not that of this Prophecy which in 1894, 2 years before I was born, contained verse fragments from my *Ombilic des Limbes* which was published 1925, but mine is a whole different story which endeavors to escape by hook or by crook from that of this prophecy which was reading out my poetry inside my stillborn head even *before* I was born. My personal intention is that my poems and my drawings the way I write and draw them are the fruit of my present and immediate personal inspiration and not that they should have been plagiarized and lifted beforehand by I know not what criminal mind of the past *in my present,* for this spirit's name is Lucifer, its name is Jesus Christ, and its name is Christos Parabrahma, a spirit that materialized one day out of the abyss of nothingness. All this, dear Madame and friend, to remind you of something and make you comprehend something that is essential for both you and me. And that is that your mind as an individual being will be lost unless I succeed in definitively defending mine. Mine can't go under, but I can't defend my friends' minds contingent on the continuity and integrity of my own unless my friends make up their own minds to comprehend that it is urgent to come to my rescue, not in the sense of this present life (i.e. rescuing an imprisoned poet who has been set free but lacks the financial means to live on the outside and the company of familiars to help him out from day to day) but in a sense *contrary* to that of the present life, i.e. as a traveler of infinity who being angered by the monstrosity of this planet intends, just as he went to Mexico to shut up the old witch doctors, to travel to Tibet and go for the throats of the black magic lama enchanters there and blow up St. Peter's in Rome, and by the same token, St. Johns in the Lateran, en route.

For that purpose I have a cane—prepared by me—which is in the possession of my daughter Catherine Chilé whom you saw fighting for me yesterday, the 29th of November, all day long, and you and Jean Dubuffet *also fought at my side* and you even said to me when I was at the dinner table at 6 o'clock in the evening and you were feeling smothered and as if your brains and genitals had been scooped out of you and the phallus of evil was raping you in the throat, you said to me like the loving souls and close friends that you are, having complete confidence in me and coming to ask me to give you my support: "But what's this all about, Monsieur Artaud?" I made two signs to help you with my breath and my hand like two lavender-colored arched beams inside my body between the shoulder blades and the breastbone and I think that must have made you all feel better, you, Jean Dubuffet, René de Solier and Henri Parisot

but I can't go on working that way and I therefore need the cane and one other thing that is essential for me, which I would have wanted to speak about with you in Rodez when we were sitting on the terrace of the cafe in front of the cathedral and you reminded me that you knew me.—If you and Jean Dubuffet could only find for me in Paris a little of that Thule. The banning of Thule is what caused all the enchantments that fastened on me among the Tarahumaras as I have related in my little book, which I shall send you—*Journey to the Land of the Tarahumaras*. It caused the agony I went through on horseback, as I rode into the mountains no longer able to hold onto the reins with my hands and, in the grip of a frightful diarrhea, obliged to dismount every fifteen minutes to relieve myself.—It is a thule that no peyote dance will replace and if you can bring me some I shall take the necessary measures to render it benign so that it can never poison me or anyone. For opium was not a poison originally but it was the enchantments of the priests of the Himalayas, transferred to Jerusalem at one time and to Rome at another, that made of it a thing poisonous and ill-starred. I shall make of it something good for authentic minds. All the more so in that time presses, dear Madame and great friend, and there is within you a demon secreted by the Himalayan priests which, using

your being and your good mind intended to snatch and drink the mind and being of my daughter Cécile whereas you have your own mind and being.—I sent you a tau cross with 2 bursts of red flowers at either end

in order to remind you of your true mind and enable you to recollect your root life within and against the Unconscious.

In conclusion, I remind you that I have gold at the Bank of France and for eight years they had been making me forget it by enchantment in order to make me think that I was penniless and force me to live on handouts from those who love me whereas it behooveth them that love me to wrest the stolen gold from them that hate me.—In 1918 I made a deposit of a vast sum at the Bank of France in Marseille, this sum was transferred to Paris when I went there in 1920, and a mass of gold ingots equivalent to this sum was stored in the vaults of the Bank on Rue de La Vrillière. At different times I have wirtten several checks on it, of which several were purloined by enchantment; I wrote very few of my own free will. But in July or August, 1937, I gave a check for 10 million francs to my friend Anie Besnard, and she wasn't even my mistress, to help her get by when she was without other means and had at one point come close to becoming a streetwalker in order to make a living.

Anie Besnard visited me four times after I was locked up. After 1940 I received just one tiny letter from her, in 1943. She reluctantly took the trouble to bring me a few provisions in 1944 and took the train at Gare d'Orléans, was murdered and replaced by a double—some say she never actually left—but how does one actually or not actually leave? In my opinion she did leave, but something of her that had never yet quite understood me remained up in the air, and it is up to me to find it and make it come to me. As for this Anie Besnard who received 10 million francs from me and abandoned me to die, miserable and forgotten, without comfort or relief, that one is in fact nothing but a double and this double is another person with another birth certificate which has taken the place of the real person who was born in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. I believe Jean Dubuffet belongs to the Sûreté. He can help me

clear up this business; but there's more—an enchantment was beamed at me by some people last night—they were on Rue de la Chaussée d'Antin or in its immediate vicinity, in a cafe or in their house. And I am certain he will be kind enough to track them down along with several of their accomplices and put the hooks into them, but the best would be for both of you to join me here and bring me what I requested, which I need in order to finish off this world. All the best. Sincerely,

Antonin Artaud

The whole business was perpetrated on me so as not to have to surrender the gold in the Bank of France to me, its rightful owner. I never even touched the capital on the 1918 sum—my checks were merely drawn on the interest.

The sum I speak of in the last paragraph was 100 billion francs. And it must be intact, and drawing interest, too.

TO HENRI PARISOT

Rodez, 6 December 1945
Dear friend,

My letters from Rodez series ended with the last letter, but the story of my life did not come to an end with it, not completely, so here is its postscript.

The memories I have of my eternal life encompass not only this present existence but several others. And if in this life I have passed through Marseille, Smyrna, Lyon, Lourdes, Paris, Rome, Berlin, Mexico city, Brussels, Dublin, Le Havre, Rouen, and Rodez, two thousand years ago I passed through Nazareth and Jerusalem, where I spent several years.—And I recall how, on a certain winter evening in Nazareth, I met up with a sleazy-looking couple, a man and a woman whom I had been following for some time—magicians—but until that moment they had given me the slip—the woman was called Mary and her husband Joseph and their family name was, I believe, Nalpas.—The woman was pregnant with a child I would have done anything to prevent from coming into

the world because I knew where he came from and who he was, namely that his very existence was the fruit of certain filthy enchantments directed at none other than myself.—And I'd sworn to go to any lengths to prevent him from being born. And between me and that man and woman and the horde of all the black magicians that have ceaselessly done their bidding over the ages there was a dreadful and inexpiable combat, on my side to prevent the birth, and on theirs to deliver this reprobate foetus upon which both Hell and Earth had agreed to confer the soul of that abyss known as Jesus Christ.

I shall tell all this in a subsequent letter or book.

The individual known as Jesus Christ, whose true name was, I believe, Antonin Nalpas, was a magician like his parents and time and again I was obliged to fight him.—Because on the moral level this character was a slimy little creep and more than once I caught him at the same tricks that his phantom has been up to here in Rodez, insinuating himself into my body in a dream, in order to magnetize my testicles or enchant my excreta.

I can't go into further details on all that because time presses and it's important that this series of letters should be published without further delay, but only yesterday I recalled with horror a final memory of my life in Jerusalem 2,000 years ago.—That already there my name was Monsieur Artaud I know, and that everyone there took me for a babe in the woods and an oddball, accused me of hearing voices, of declaiming and singing out loud, of talking to myself and—because I wrote and recited poetry—said I was a loafer, a good-for-nothing.

One day, in order to get something to eat, I went to work as a hired hand in a locksmith's shop, but at the sight of me talking to myself and laughing at my dreams he fired me that same day. I didn't eat daily in those times, and I wandered the streets in search of a chance lodging and one day a woman pretended to take an interest in me but when I understood what she wanted of me and the price in pimpery and shame with which I would be paying for the room and board she offered, I turned on my heel and left the place without entering. —Judea, and especially Jerusalem were in those times infested with magicians and sorcerers who relentlessly harassed me in order to deprive me of my last remaining strength, homeless as I was and reduced to eating when I could find it, which was almost never.—At moments I flew into horrible rages that made me burn everything in sight and made the screaming mob that surrounded me shut their mouths.—I have that same mob here in Rodez but I strike back from

a distance and not directly as I did in Jerusalem; the name of the mob is all mankind with a handful of very rare exceptions consisting of the friends of my works, I'm saying the true friends of my works, and it wouldn't take long to count them. Be that as it may, the police and the rabbis put me under arrest one night in an orchard full of olive trees where I was sleeping under the stars, being without a roof over my head. I went through a trial hearing, although a certain Pontius Pilate pronounced me innocent of any crime, the vast constituency of imbecility *rose up* to demand that I should be crucified. I recall this room where having seated me on a wooden stool they planted a crown of thorns on my head and put a reed cane in my hand to replace the one they had taken away from me which, with its 200 million fibres, had served me to crush all my witch doctors. And the entire populace crossed the threshold of that doorway open to the afternon sun, to spit on me and slap me around and cover me with insults.—I also recall the degrading punishment of crucifixion, at a place named Golgotha, and how I screamed my guts out when they raised and planted the cross, and how my entire physical being suddenly plunged earthwards under the nails that gripped it by the hands and feet.—I pass over the details of all that happened up until the middle of that afternoon.

But, once dead, my corpse was thrown out onto a dungheap and I remember stewing there I don't know how many days or hours before I finally woke up. For I didn't realize at first that I was dead and I had to make up my mind to understand this, in order to come round successfully. At this point, some friends who had at first completely abandoned me, decided to come and embalm my corpse and were astounded but by no means overjoyed to see me back alive.

As you can imagine, I was an embarrassment, an annoyance.

But feeling my hands crushed and caked with blood, my body putrid, and my face covered with the dried venom of the collective expectorations, in a corpse that went on living, filled me with such horror at my own state and that of things generally, a cataclysmic fury came over me in a tremor that turned the world upside down, and there were battles for more than one day in Judea.—Is the same about to happen this time here in Rodez?

And, in the wake of the murder of Mlle Seguin who left Paris last May to join me and whose corpse likewise spent several hours next to a ditch, what new murders will I need to point to, in order to convince the few friends I still have in Paris and on earth to make up their minds to get me out of here and come with me to Tibet?

This letter is to be published following the others and as a conclusion to the story of my life.

Cordially,
Antonin Artaud

P.S. This morning I also learned that Robert Denoël was just murdered.

TO ARTHUR ADAMOV

Espalion, 22 March 1946
Dear Arthur Adamov,

I just got your short note, but rest assured, Dr. Ferdière set me free this Tuesday (March 19th), signing for a one-week trial release, and I am at Espalion (in the Lot) staying at the Hotel Berthier. Also, he said the final release would come through next week. I wrote a note to Marthe Robert which I enclosed in a registered letter addressed to you. I think you must have received it by now. I wanted her to be fully apprised of the true situation. Because money isn't the whole story; and my incarceration was merely the result of a dirty set-up involving the police which I'm not sure has run its course—to the contrary, I have every reason to believe it's continuing, *however surreptitiously*, right now. Therefore I have a legitimate grievance at all the filthy things that have been done to me but this time I am not going to be so naive as to go out there as I am—as we all are—and attack them from the rooftops the way I did in Ireland. I won't even permit myself any more little jokes, like when I said, "You're *green*, Madame," to a woman at the Dôme, because I don't want to be attacked from behind once again and get knocked on the head the way I was in Dublin in 1937; or the way I got nicked on the top of the heart when I was stabbed in the back in Marseille in 1916. I'll also refrain from talking about opium or heroin, or trying to obtain them, and—believe me—I'll have to refrain from even mentioning them (because walls have ears) to avoid getting myself into deep trouble.

But Poetry takes odd turns, Arthur Adamov, I mean odd returns in flames, viz. the eruptions of Popocatepel and Vesuvius, St. Elmo's fire, the War of 1938, the earthquake of Messina, the eruption of Mt. Pelé, etc., etc. This is by way of saying I'd like you to tell all your friends the human unconscious is very sick, and in the presence of certain people it stinks stronger than a heap of plague victims. And I don't know whether the collective unconsicious is still capable of *profiting* from the theatre or of exercising itself other than harmfully at certain art shows. Be that as it may, life goes on; and so it will continue, until it suddenly explodes like an old volcano neutralized by collective dishonesty, only to suddenly reawaken.

Yes, I am delighted at the idea of publishing a little book at Sagittaire with *The Mothers in the Stable*, the Lautréamont essay, and some notes. I have written a certain number of notes in which many people will learn a great deal. How many pages do you need? Fifteen or so, with a short introduction? I'll send them to you next week. I wish to title the book *Charity for Poor Popocatepel, s.v.p.*, which means I'm only asking for a minor eruption to swallow up 300 cities—not merely like the atomic bomb in Japan that swallowed up just one city, albeit one of 300,000 inhabitants. Poor Popocatepel isn't merely dormant, it's dead, whereas Vesuvius is only dormant. And, being dead, even a volcano has to go through many a repression, many a pit, many a gate—not of tears but of tearing to pieces—before exploding as one might wish, because I want what I write to make something explode in the mind, but I want what explodes in the mind to make something outside the mind explode: earth, war, nations, dialects, epidemics. I'll make no prophecies as in *The New Revelations of Being*, no more Tarots; notes of *true* rebellion against all that which inhibits, stunts, and warps by antique manipulations. It's not enough to point out neuroses. The neuroses have now got to be exploded under the fist of the most authentic repression. Popocatepel isn't so far away that one of the stones hurled by its eruption can't reach Paris and flatten the Church of the Madeleine; but nevertheless it is because Popocatepel set its sights too high in the lap of its mother earth that the hatred of the spirits killed it, using the jealousy of its enemy Vesuvius. And this is no mere symbol. Because all the meat-and-potatoes spirits issuing out of the mud of the Etruscan world to give birth to the century of Augustus and the *Commentaries* of Julius Caesar intended to keep an active volcano within reach, right next door to their own home ground. But they could only satisfy their requirements by taking the life of Popocatepel. However

Popocatepel is no fool, etc., etc. It's in this vein that I would like to write the introduction to this little book. So you see, the idea interests me.

I am aware, Arthur Adamov, that you have had a lot to do with my getting released, and that Dr. Ferdière was very impressed with everything you said about me. But, pending the explosion of a dead volcano, haven't you heard that—in tandem with the effort you're making in my behalf by organizing a benefit show and Roger Blin's plans for a gala performance for me—people all the way from Kabul and Turkestan, and also Bohemia, have gotten together to bring me certain substances no longer available in Europe, as well as money? I have been expecting them for several weeks, but they're having terrible difficulties with Customs as well as a few other difficulties of the same order as I encountered in Mexico (police, army) as I was scaling the mountain at an altitude of 5,500 meters. For the Castle of San Angelo, the Castle of the Popes, and the old Tower of Prague are not quite as dormant as they might seem. When my people arrive, I will most certainly make my idea of the Theatre of Cruelty come true at last.

Your faithful friend,
Antonin Artaud

TO GEORGES BRAQUE

Paris, 16 January 1947
Dear Monsieur Georges Braque,

I have been meaning to write to you for years.

It first occurred to me at the Rodez asylum, in my very special situation there. One day I said to myself:

Georges Braque would understand. I'll write him.

Next, here in Paris, on my return from Rodez, at the time when the benefit sale of works by painters was being organized for me, I was told:

Georges Braque gave a picture for you.

You didn't even know me. I'd never had the pleasure of meeting you. I was

especially touched by the gift because of something I always thought I read in your canvases.

Cubism reopens the entire issue of the occult linear world, and it's no longer even a question of tearing internal tissue. However, that kind of tearing is everywhere in the work of other painters. Under the pretext of "a clean slate," as it were, the painter wished to surprise the inner workings of a ready-made cosmos, the existing one, rather than create another.

Yours are the only canvases in which I always had the impression of a will to total genesis, with no sensationalism, moreover, the pure element being sought in accord with intrinsic necessity, as though calmly and in the absence of all passion.— Yet if the universe thus repeated was calm and without passion, this is because its genesis was a criminal one, Georges Braque, and it's not obvious at a first reading, but, on a close look at certain shapes as highlighted and recomposed by you, one would have said you were aware of this.

But I have always had somewhat the impression that an absolute solution of the problem was not your intention.

Nature is there, she is to blame; I have some idea of the direction in which she should have evolved so as to be pure, untainted with the line of all transgression. But I am a man. I did my evolving by myself, from head to toe. This I believe. When the architecture of humanity has been remade, this will perhaps rate some notice. It was at any rate the heart that sinned and went soft, not out of lovingkindness but the weakness of sexuality. Maybe one day I shall be able to tell where true sensibility hung on, that nonhybrid sensibility which kept its race, and this is how the latest Georges Braques, year after year, evince a type of sensibility that puts me in mind of certain Etruscan mysteries.— A sensibility aloof from the unctions of the moistened heart.

All this by way of telling you, Georges Braque, that at Rodez I thought if I wrote you, "They're wrong, they are trying to make me pass for a psychotic, a raving maniac, because I believe in magic and persist in saying that magical operations of a particular order are being mounted against me and are what caused them to lock me up in the first place and throw away the key," you would believe me.

I am no longer locked up, of course, but the magical operations have only escalated in guile, meanness, and efficacy. Presently, at certain hours of the night, on certain days of the year, month, or week, the entire earth is an immense circus of enchantments so cleverly camouflaged nobody notices them and yet they orchestrate events from afar and on high (!) in tune with the suppura-

tions of certain *uncouth* overtones of an arch-criminal, dissolute, premeditated, obscene, erotic disorder, nevertheless also reserving on the side a special table with the eternal discriminant of fear, in accordance however with that order of personalistic egotism that is least veiled and most unrepressed in the invoking of orgasm for its own sake, a liberated, unchecked libido, and the affirmation there is no harm in extras and the bare necessities are for somebody else, never oneself. To think up such a morality, nobody ever needed culture or education. All that is necessary is to come out in favor of the free satisfaction of the flesh on the sexual level, and that's worth an entire theurgy. The basic principle of today's so-called mass mind, amorphous and unconscious as it is, is:

Let's harm this hurt, sick man for having wanted to prevent us from enjoying our extras.

Extras here means the dirty erotic satisfaction of making somebody suffer who already suffered too much in order to keep clean and stay detached and pure. On this level everyone is a witch doctor, and I mean everyone, a magician enchanting a humble and retired artist.

In addition, I say everyone is aware. In magic, gurus, yogis, cenobites, anchorites, masters, instructors, and all their ilk get paid. They pay them with a bit of sperm, milk, or shit specially prepared and shot into space. Out of 5 billion men, 3 billion are practicing this magic *with full knowledge and awareness*, enchanting cops and psychiatrists in order to make lucid minds shut their mouths.

Antonin Artaud

TO ANIE BESNARD

Paris, 6 February 1947
Dear little Anie,

I was extremely upset by your phone call this morning. I would have preferred to believe you were really ill, but in fact I can't.

It seems that once again, as in October 1944, there was a plan to prevent you

from coming to me.

In Paris and elsewhere, there are people with a vested interest in never seeing our former relations of friendship, affection, even *love*, start up again.

Yet what an innocent love.

Its very innocence is what upsets them all. That a heart, namely yours, could be faithful to me without having had sex with me, this is something people never run into in today's world, Anie. To love someone for sheer love, without the slightest physical involvement, a love based on honor and devotion and lovingkindness; to help someone and do for them and not expect anything in return other than a mutual bond.

Anie, you must realize everyone is your enemy. Your sleeping soul they don't comprehend. Nobody understands you. I am the only person who cares for you because you're *you*, Anie, and that's all.

Anie, you should have paid attention and minded me *diligently*.

I'm working. I'm not merely writing books. I'm working to transform something in the whole of life, hateful as it is; and that is something they all know and want at any price to stop me from carrying off; because in the universe I'm planning, sex will be out, barred, debarred; there will be hardly anybody left. None but those who were capable of loving me for sheer love, for the love that is a pure relationship; and I've found scarcely 10 such.

Anie, I would like you to delve into your memory and pinpoint exactly where you were and what you were doing on the 14th of October, 1944.

Magic is stronger than people think.

Colette Prou was murdered with an ax in a cell nextdoor to mine at the General Hospital, Le Havre, end of September 1937, and her body was dumped piecemeal in a vacant lot on the outskirts of the hospital grounds by the male nurse who had dismembered her.

And yet certain people have seen her alive, although quite ill, not too long ago. I can't tell you in a letter all that can be done in such a case to get such results, but black magic has done it in others, Anie, more than once.

And I am wondering if you didn't take a train for Rodez on the 14th of October, 1944, and get out at a certain station in the middle of the night, only to be murdered, suffocated, and your body dumped in a field; whereupon, one fine morning, you woke up in your own bed, a bit vague in the head, quite vague in fact, no longer aware of what had happened to you over a period extending from several weeks to one, two, or three months.

Please search your memory. Try and see if you don't find a gap, one you will then be able to fill with the recollection of all the horrors you were forced to endure *"on the astral plane"* at the hands of demons, i.e. men in present life who dismembered the vanished soul of Anie and, on the astral plane, scattered it in thin air, whereupon other demons, using certain magical passes, brought her back in order to erase this loathsome crime.

Kisses.

Antonin Artaud

PS : All this was to tell you you have only one reliable friend and that is me. Outside of myself, I urge you to consider absolutely every one of the people around you as an enemy—your mother, your sister, your brother, etc., etc.,

and to consider they are your enemies to the extent that you think like me there is something else in life beyond an ass and a mouth, a nice little mouth to stuff with goodies,

and that something is your honor, your life's honor. Guard it with your life.

Never let them insult you in your life,

your individuality,

your body.

That is all-important.

We are living in a world, Anie, where neither man nor woman

respect the human body any more.

And my body is, among other things, very good.

This is why I have so many demons at me in the night when I am sleeping.

Demons?

No!

Men who are worse than the most disgusting animals whose sole remaining objective on this planet is to pollute Artaud's body.

The other objective is to make Artaud pass for *a raving maniac* when he denounces this ignominious fact.

As if it weren't happening, whereas it's the only thing that's happening—the one and only thing that is happening anymore by night is the exploitation of Artaud's body.

And how much more seminal fluid do they require, in fact, to satisfy this

insatiable need to have sex and call it love?

Yet who, in their waking state, would ever dream that every bit of that semen came out of Artaud's body and *that* is the reason Antonin Artaud is such a sick man.

This letter is for your eyes only.

(Translated by David Rattray)

From INTERJECTIONS:

POUNDING AND GISM

The words we use have been handed down to me and I use them, but not to make myself understood, not to finish emptying them out of me,
then why?
Just because *I do not use them*,
in fact I do nothing other than keep quiet
and pound.
Other than that if I speak it's because of fucking, I mean the universal fornication continues which makes me forget not to think.
The fact is that I say nothing and do nothing, that I use neither words nor letters,
I use no words and I don't even use letters.

I have never founded, started or followed a movement.
I have been a surrealist, that's a fact,
but I believe I must have been so in deed,
and indeed I was one but I wasn't one when I initiated or signed manifestos unless it was to insult

a pope,
a dalai lama,
a buddha,
a doctor,
an academic,
a priest,
a cop,
a poet,
a writer,
a man,
a pedagogue,
a revolutionary,
an anarchist,
a cenobite,

a hermit,
a dean,
a yogi,
an occultist.

As for the reactionaries, the fascists, the communists now in power, the rightists and the leftists, they won't even be insulted, they won't even be broken up, won't be decomposed, those bastards, the way we say: nature does it, it's her process, but that's not enough, and there is something more serious to be done in that case.

So, then, so why once again a tract from you, Artaud, and why haven't you gotten the hell out since you've been given the sign to get out.
"Make way for the young, for the newcomers, for those who have nothing more to say but who are there.
The situation stinks."
It's precisely that it doesn't yet stink enough to keep criticism, or attack, or judgment, or aggression of any kind away from me.
And why the hell should I care? In fact it might mean nothing to me at all and I might disregard it in contempt but the trouble is precisely that it does mean something to me.
I mean that the nuttiness springing up all around does not leave my body unscathed, I am infected with it as if by varicocele, by blennorrhea, AND I DON'T LIKE THAT ONE BIT.
Style horrifies me and I notice that when I write I'm always producing it, so then I burn all my manuscripts and there remain only those that call to mind a suffocation, a gasping, a strangulation in I know not what lower depths because that's true.
Ideas horrify me, I don't believe in them any longer
and I want them to be set in motion
and for people to say I am crazy: crazies bite, right?
So let the disputator come,
he'll say to me: this exists, that doesn't,
and things are like this or not like that,
I bite him.
for I really don't believe in words or in the ideas stirred up by words, and inside of words,

to be means no more to me or LESS than not to be, and nothing no longer means anything to me,
and silence as well, no more and even less.
And it isn't that I am neither to the right nor to the left and I'm even less middle of the road and I hate equilibrium even more than deportation,
on condition that it's I who carry myself away, and I get carried away when I see the unchanging middle aproaching.
For I see clearly that certain people are beginning to hold it against me that I'm old hat.
I hate philosophy, magic, occultism, esoterism, and yoga, as well as anatomy,
ANATOMY I say, and medicine, arithmetic, algebra, trigonometry, differential calculus, and the precession of the equinoxes,
and as well, though no doubt no one will believe me, a gut hatred of poetry.

I have received lots of anonymous letters in my life. The last one, sent just a few weeks ago, told me of the mailing of an old poem that I never received, but it only gave me the title without comment:

THE LAMENT OF OLD ARTAUD ASSASSINATED IN THE OTHER LIFE AND WHO WILL NOT COME BACK AGAIN IN THIS ONE.

For fear no doubt that I might forget that I was back and welcome back.

Another letter chides me for writing in French, in good French I mean, and for using flowery language like the rest. Nobody has as yet reproached me for being dialectical or dogmatic for as to dialectics I don't know what it is. But finally I too have been reproached for also believing in verbal popery, for attaching a value to sentences that are solidly constructed, elegantly strung together, full of rhythm and well grounded. "And that, I've been told, makes us laugh, the way you believe in beautiful French.
You attack authority, society, religiosity, and rituals as though those words still hid facts and ideas. And above all you believe in words, in the strong words you use. Nothing but emptiness has ever meant anything, you're full of yourself and full of everything. Beat it."
I must say that I'm the one who translates all these criticisms into studied French, for the young people who have addressed me in this fashion have done so only from a distance, and as if from one edge of space to the other, or by mail, and have only made obscene gestures at me to prove to me that

I was on the wrong track, for close up it would have come to blows.
But they haven't yet dared to risk that.

So I must say that over the thirty years I've been writing I haven't entirely found yet,
neither my word nor my language yet,
but the instrument that I have been ceaselessly forging.

Feeling as I do like an uneducated illiterate, this instrument will not be supported by letters or by alphabetic signs, there one is still too close to figurative, ocular and auditory convention.

Whoever has tied up meaning, tied up thought, and whoever has tied up meaning thought, tied them up in terms of a preventive ideation whose formal written tables, whose tables of perceptual significations were inscribed upon the walls of an inverse brain.
For the human brain is no more than a double which by projection emits a sound for a sign, a sense for a sound, a sentiment for a sign of life, an idea for a movement, everything is written, lived on astral matter and letters are only movements that require a little bit more of the great film to unreel its unveilings.
A printed letter is an obsolete movement which once again comes to project the gism of a terminal phosphorus,
and soon all letters will be read,
all letters completely exhausted.

And each book written will be read, and it won't be able to say anything anymore to those completely decomposed brains, after being arbitrarily imposed and re-imposed.

ALL OF THAT IS VERY WELL BUT I HAVE NEVER FALLEN FOR SUCH NONSENSE.

For letters are no more than the simplistic graphism that might correspond to the necessity of being awakened by the reflex spectre of an organ created for a certain time and condemned at birth:

THE BRAIN.

The lobes of the brain aren't infinite, nor the infinite either, but it lasts.

I know a state beyond mind, beyond consciousness, beyond being, in which there are no more words nor letters
but into which one enters by screams and through blows.

And it is not sounds or meaning that come out,
nor words,
but BODIES.

Pounding and gism,

in the infernal crucible where it's never a question of words anymore nor of ideas.

Pounding to death and fucking the face, gism on the face, is the last language, the last music I know,

and I swear to you that bodies come out of this
and that these are *animate* BODIES.

ya menin
fra te sha
vazile
la vazile
a te sha menin
tor menin
e menin menila
ar menila
e inema imen

CIVIL STATUS

It's me, Antonin Artaud,
50 years old,
who does it,
taking the skin, and splitting it,
instead of waiting for its physiological rehabilitation by a tool in the sense of a new daddy,

just as when vertigo occurs
I don't submit to god
the straightening out of the father's children,
but first of all
I let the merinos piss, while kicking beings about, so they'll get away from my fire,

for I am, as everyone knows,
that great genius,
the one who says so,
who wrote,
not the Cabala,
the Popol-Vuh,
the Brahma-Putra,
the Kama-Yoni,
and Ji ni ini ini
of all the imputed yogis,

but this avant mamtram of filth,
of pestilence
and pus
through which life
suppurated
advancing toward the wall of hardened spasm
and of sleet
that the ever benumbed flu
of being
grates to death

when it ripens
the tongue of its inflammation.

When I eat, the gourmand void at the bottom of the throat,
of the gluttonous orifice,
summons the alimentary bolus to monopolize it to the detriment of the teeth and the tongue,
with which the glottis behind it has strange complicities.
but all that is of no interest at all,
for the tongue
is an obscene slut who in front is ready to follow the teeth in their detailed work of mastication,
and behind,
is still more ready to let itself be gobbled up by the orifice,
and to push, lewdly and treacherously, the food toward the orifice,

the tongue,

pregnant with all its ancestral salacity,
and which moreoever descends from it like a light of the holy spirit.
The fore-mentioned apostles, on the day called Pentecost, 40 days after the *flight* of Christ facing the martyrdom of Golgotha and the revolting death of the authentic martyr of Golgatha (who was called Artaud like me, and I do believe it was me),
believed they saw tongues land on them, enter into them,
but in fact they did not see them there, nor from there,
no longer being there,
not yet being there,
having never been there,
they saw again the vast scene of pregenital swill where the body of man, not satisfied with having a link of blood-sausage between his thighs, wanted to have another one between his teeth,

where the tongue could coat and lubricate the detonations of speech as well as the machinegun fire of I know not what mythic dental anger at the aggressive rush of food,
said thus, amid the cave-ins of invading nourishment, under the tireless carronades of teeth, there are mephitic trenches of gas, appalling ravines of hollow matter,
strange molecular wells, amid the rushes of food,
but the entrance of the tongue changed all that,
mastication passed onto the level of the simple micturition of a stupid erotic masturbation.

Wednesday November 27th 1946, 11 p.m.,
beings that have not swallowed the nail,
but have swallowed the point,
and have held themselves between the hard and the flabby,

those one cannot disintricate
because if one looks for them in the breath
they take refuge in the body,
and if one looks for them at one point on the body
they claim to be braided there in breath,
lightning gashing the body
like a negation of body,
having more body than all breath.

They amass in the body,
outside of whoever controls this body
and for them has not left it,
being neither intelligent enough to reign over its mental faculty,
nor sufficiently that suffering body to be all this body,
in time, the extent of time,

nor old enough in itself to be as old as this body,
nor vegetatively ingenerate enough to be all this innate body,
nor antecedently
im-planted
to be what this body
is,
nor instinctively
supple enough,
to be its sempiternal ascent,
and which, to finally flee the whip,
takes refuge not in being or life,
heart, soul, consciousness, or mind,
but in the strength of the body itself,
latent, in the process of rising,
not in pure volition,
but in lightning or whip,
in the surface inert in fact,
in the flagellation of fact,
in the reputation between fact and surface,
the depths of the etected
surface (it's the sur-frère of detecting)
in the etection of the surface
the thickness of the incorporated is made,
the inert of the body raised by it,
of this body in the process of raising itself,
the thickness of the body in tapul, projected by catapult,
the *molar* that volition extracted from itself like an evil.

Ideas don't come without limbs, and so these are no longer ideas but limbs, limbs fighting among themselves.

The mental world was never anything but that which remains from a hellish trampling of organs while the man who had them is no more.

It is thought from below that leads,
there is absolutely no criterion of spirit, of judgement,
spirit is no longer anything but an adventitious memory,
the more a body is a body, the farther it is from spirit and from its consciousness,
and the more worth it has in body,
and the more the idea of worth escapes,
with its value and its quality,
and the more the life of the body proper keeps it from differentiating itself
against value and quality,
between value and quality,
and drives the quality of existing to despair;
and the more the body radiates completely in the oblivion of intrinsic value,
and of the spirit of quality,
and the more it radiates and becomes concrete,
in that the body wanted to squeeze itself out and to collect, in order to completely become body, in its hatred of spirituality.

The principle of yoga is based on the eternal happiness of swallowing the sorrows of others.

What body is is the emaciation of one's own matter,
achieved by oneself;
what has not been achieved in one's own sorrow
falls away at the hour of death,
until becoming pure spirit, and so that a part of the body can become the evil matter of pure spirit.

lo menedi
bardar
ta zerubida

lo menedida
bardar
la ter
tupi
bahelechi
bertoch

na menezucht
bordi
menucht
saba
dezuda

dezuda ravi

Thus perish the spirits of all those who have never wanted to take the trouble of having a body, and want in spite of everything to have the freedom of the city under the reign of truly solidified bodies.

For nothing bestializes a being like the taste for eternal happiness, the search for eternal happiness at any price, and mademoiselle Lucifer is that slut who never wanted to abandon eternal happiness.

But now the ancient cosmic prospection of god will no longer occur.

The great total dimension is to become as a simple man strong as all infinity.

What's going to happen is that men are going to show their instincts repressed for so long,
and I my true language;

a ta aishena
shoma
shora
borozi
bare

a red ulcer reed
with a fart fiber penis.

opotambo
zorim
nietecta
opotembech ari nicto

And the nail will remain a nail throughout all eternity, when the Portici gull of my sensations passes and my body remains intact.

insulpici de talpiquante
a la piquante e salapice

Thus it is that the processional serpent of all bodies, with its mask of red horror, falls to the earth beneath my feet;
and it gave this mask back to me, as though the earth had not deserved it.

And I said in the midst of the void,
the void of seven eternities:
The self is not the body, it is the body that is the self.

The Mass holds the East as well as the West,
holds the East where it does not occur more firmly than the West where it does,
the proof being that it is to the extreme peak of the summit of the Himalayas that the obscene priests of Rome, Jerusalem, and Lebanon will have to go to finish guzzling the benefice of their daily assassination of the human body.

archina

ne coco rabila
co rabila
e caca rila

archeta
ne capsa rifila
ca rifila
e carta chila

archita
ne corto chifila
corti fila
e capsa chila

Translation:
Haven't they sufficiently decorticated
the patibulary cavities of my skull
and drawn the burned hides
of their million damned souls
down upon themselves.

The Mass is supported by the human orifice,
it takes place on the slope of that bone
through which virginal deloused man
pukes.

Man holds the stolen stone at a certain place in his skull,
for his own skull is a window (a way of being open to being),
for mine it is the niched stone,
this stone has an aura which is being,
and it is in the aura of being,
the integral aura of being, the tide of inexhaustible will,
is it will itself, or its rape?
It's the rape of will that created this psychic sea in which all being believes it is being agitated,
and agitating,
it's thought, that aqueous stone that drags along like the old monk frock of the most sordid beggary,

Yes, thought is that obscene bitch that always wants to get screwed,
and that vampirizes in order to get it first,
and every man is that evil thought,
which claims to be spirit and science, when it doesn't even have a body,
when it is only that foul, rotten, corrupt body, full if itch mites,
green with pustules,
that man alone can stipple,
that foul, mangy slut-meat, stuffed with rats and old farts, I mean old sins.
Now I've never believed in sin, but looking at man today I have a good
mind to reconsider it.

Friday December 13th 1946,
the espousals of my rondelles,
testicular, infantile rondelles,
by the palpatory
intellectual lips
of the lama
have not yet set fire to *that:*
have not even lit a fire in me:

they made my daughter Ana emerge
from the charnel house of beast piss beings,

the wall contrary to beings that emerged from a point blossoming on the
inverse face of the bodies;
and for one night that's enough.

I know absolutely nothing about it,
that's why I'll be able to lead
the coincidence of the sexual tail
where those who
aphorhyme
ufourmly
rally by turn
my buncey
tail,
bunts of pulmonary
udders,
a father-mother bone,
an occipital ribbon,
are *placed*.

Thinking back
this Sunday
afternoon
December 8th, 1946
on my pursuit of the tail,
the little white
parasites
pressed right up to the exit of the glans.
Sperm?

They cast in me a double
who believes in god;
as for me
who believe only in myself,
I must finish killing off that automatism that makes me
raise my eyes to heaven
to call me, *me*, to witness
the purity of my intentions
while the swallowing of evil takes place;
I would do better to recover physically

than to have this "moral" surge!
What is a moral surge?
An aborted physical surge,
one that stopped short.

Compenetration,
penetration,
my language,
melange,
my language,
reconciliation,

no space,
no infinity,
no distance,
no register,
no ensemble,
no "in general,"
no totality,
no harmony;

everything down the drain
but not me,

no contact,

no light touching,
no getting close,
no penetration,
no compenetration,
no copulation,
pulation.

To bring into contact
principle molecules
and to force them
to break one upon the other
cuntspired
by means of a series of repeated propulsions
which obey the rhythms of a dance
of which the sexual act is only the bestial
and aborted caricature.

But I am the father-mother,
neither father nor mother,
neither man nor woman,

I have always been there,
always been body,
always been man.

Things are not seen from the heights of the spirit up above the body,
but are made by the body,
and on its level,
far more infinite than the level of any spirit.

Without another
law than
that of an
extremely
tenebrous,
scrupulous
and obstinate
equity.

Don't forget
Lucifer's mug
beneath his god-the-father
greasepaint,
sneering through the bars.

Electricity is a body, a weight,
the pestling of a face,
the sunken magnet of a repressed surface from the outside of a blow,
blow of the blue fist of my green hand of despair and of anger, one day
that
facing this blow
the hole that I was going to put in things
snapped my hand up
not to ward off an attack
but to be the master,
at last.

They bore holes,
they do more than hollow out notions, values,
they stifle slowly supputated proposals, as they say, like a suppurating wound,
they do not rise above their body
in order to enter consciousness,
for what is the spirit without the body?
A dishrag of dead come.
They don't enter the "mentule state,"
they don't believe there is a body called intelligence or science,
anymore than a body called god,
for they no longer see anything in the heavens,
so they understand the heavens,
they no longer believe that things are a void crisscrossed with animal ideas,
they only understand what one does not understand,
and they understand that one can no longer understand and perceive what one
sees,
for the body is too cramped there,

but the body is not down there, in the future that it swells with all that it will be,
and it is perhaps in fact thus, that god took man's property from him, who like god does not exist where he has not yet made himself,
it is only god who can be made where he has never worked, at making himself, or at existing,
thus it is that, not having worked, god took from humanity both its future and its past.
The seeds were ill-sown.
I don't know what he did, or from where he emerged to kill, infect and assassinate,
but my brain is not sick over it, no, my brain is sliced by this lowly coal-trimmer's work that god night and day indulges in on my corpse of humanity, the remains of my body tracked everywhere by the fertile vegetation of all the microbes, of all the cheese mites, and the crab lice by means of which god eats me, thus probing my depths,
because there isn't just god, but men on the carcass of Artaud the shit.

The monkey's hand is a kind of spontaneous splinter *function*
arisen from the depths of innate knowledge,
and that never wanted to work,

but lived
on the cost of all my pain
that it raked out of my big intestine,
the old old
bony hand
by which I've lost the shadow and the tain
of the plate glass forever rebacked
that it retains in its palm,
bringing back from the cemetery
all that ya had

in your butt
when your hand of a butt-raped monkey
picked evil
by the basketful
like sweet and slow buttered bread
that one silently puts back
on the old beached verso
of my brain or of my foot
or on the old genitals that I
lost
while fighting here and there
the sourness as well as
the screw nut
of the body,
including as always honesty,
old buttocky honesty,
buttock of a tonsured monkey,
picked over glands and kidneys,
of all the hearts, and cerebellums
of automatons
of men in unmoulted bodies
that form this humanity
has always meticulously brought back to me
without overlooking a hair,
where the shadow that its future genitals project
on the fat of sexuality,
without therefore overlooking a single genital
for the future genitals are thousands,
they number thousands upon thousands,
the dead genitals
that a too hurried coition
hurled to the side of the road,
blessed, baptized genitals,
having found their spouse,
the day that god succubused you,
old quim of turned milk

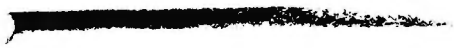
Mary,
and you, the so-called virgin,
ivi
izes
ti panaia.

Well then, have you seen the bitch
the way she stuffed her face on her droppings,
her fat old enturded tongue,
under the tube of the inborn father,
getting it up
in the ruckus
toward the one who will be born from him,
and against the corporeal heart all of whose
microbes of his heart
leap
in advance
like the microbes of spirits
beseiging my head and my cock.

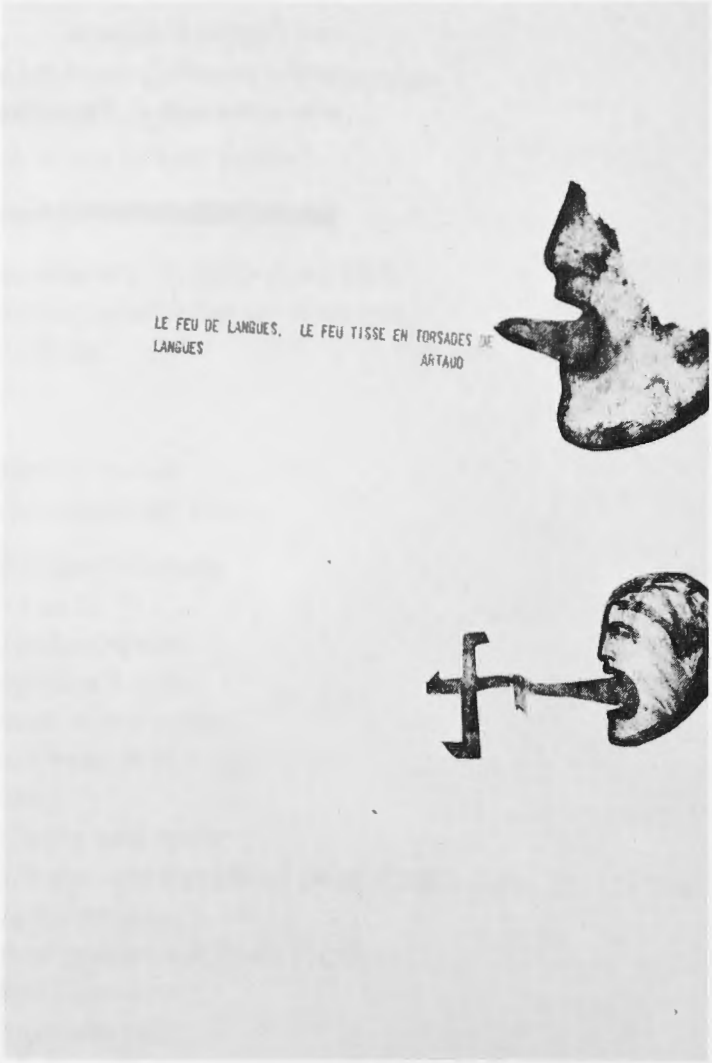
I must not have eaten enough
bouillabaisse or aioli
to thus place faith in spirits.
Spirits of beings don't exist,
the being of man doesn't exist,
the bark doesn't exist in the tree
like another tree,
it's that same being and spirit
the life of which the tree fomented (stirred up),
it's the same spirit without folds
in the heart, that separates it from the finite,
that I the master I perceive
when I see life parade past,
the finite of a hollow fiber,
in a muscle scraped to the bone
like the finite of a leaf
on this same spiritless tree,

and that with its body of cow-dung
is very much closer to eternity
than all the spirits of infinity.

(Translated by A. James Arnold
and Clayton Eshleman,
with acknowledgement to David Maclagan
who cotranslated "Pounding and Gism.")



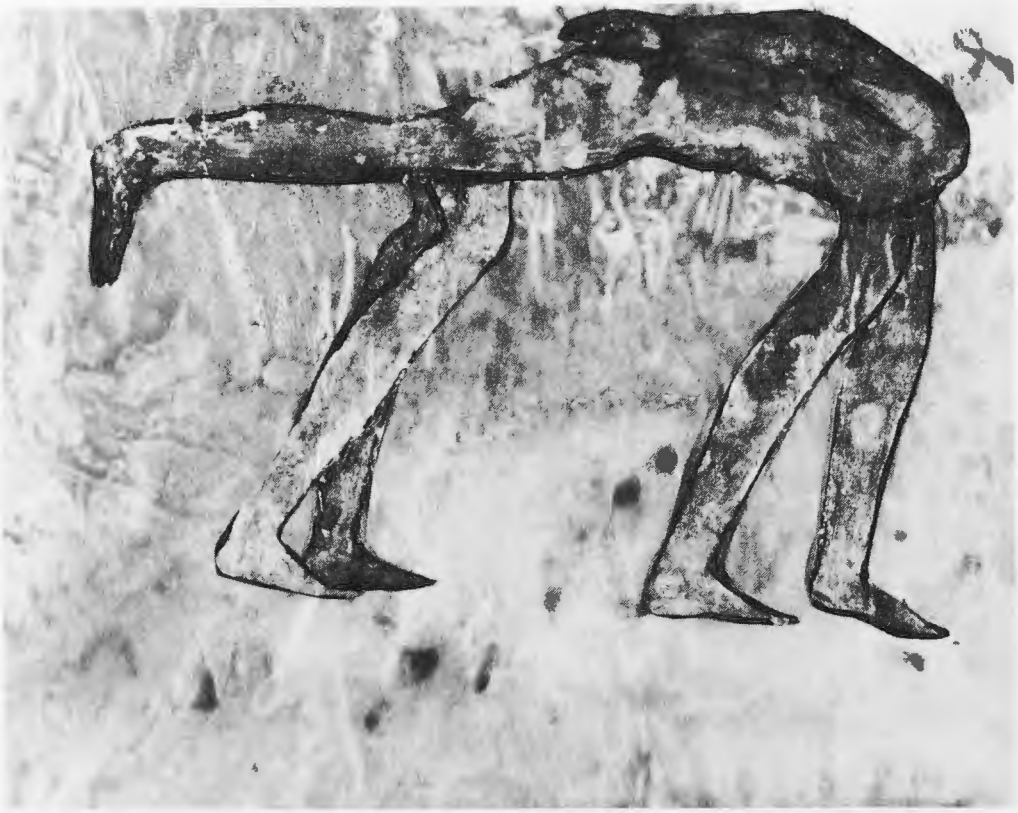
Nancy Spero



Codex Artaud (1971-72) is a gouache collage and typewriter collage work on paper; the seven reproductions here are all details from scroll-like sections of the work that are often two by ten feet in size.

JE
CONSERVE
DANS
LE
COIN
LE
PLUS
PRÉCIEUX
DE
MA
TÊTE
CETTE
PRÉOCCUPATION
DU
SEXE
QUI
ME
PÉTRIFIE
ET
M'ARRACHE
LE
SANG.

ARTAUD



L INVERTI
EST
CELUI
QUI
MANGE SON
SOI
ET
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QUE
SON
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LE
NOURRISSE,
CHERCHE
DANS
SON
SOI
SA
MERE
ET
VEUT
LA
POSSEDER
POUR
LUI.

LE
CRIME
PRIMITIF
DE
L INCESTE
EST
L ENNEMI
DE
LA
POESIE
ET
LE
TUEUR
DE
SON
IMMACULEE
POESIE.

ARTAUD

JE NE VEUX NI MOURIR, NI VIVRE ARTAUD
ME DEMANDE LUS A SENTIR MON CERVEAU ARTUAD

QU'ON LIT LES MÉMOIRES DES POÈTES MORTS,
MAIS, VIVANTS, ON NE LEUR ENVERRAIT PAS UNE TASSE DE CAFÉ OU UN VERRE D'OPIUM POUR LES RÉCONFORTER.

ARTAUD

Peter Redgrove

Six Poems

FLY BUDDHA

I.

Tasting the peach with the fingers,
The nap of velvet, the glittering flesh,
Recording of the Florida sun. An antelope:
Smells an orange with the slit
Under its eye. And the sensitivity of the eye

That brushes everything it sees
Several times a minute; and that
of the painter's brush: let's look
At this painting of a talk
In a boat at night, with fireflies;
They are discussing something
Very important below the surface of life,
Every brushstroke shows it.

II.

I said to the fly, "Get off my plate,
Go and dung-roll!" "Sir,"
He replies irritably, as one
Who knows himself well, "I go not to wallow,
But to feast! on incomparable suets,

And matchless custards in my finery
Of stripes and veined sunshades; and, no
You cannot say 'decay': I know forest-glades
Of buttered asparagus, tree-trunks
That are whole truffle, blancmange pastures, evolving.''

III.

''Meat slides through meat,'' says the fly,
''Conceive how holy to me you shit,
Like heaps of Madonnas gilded with fatty flow,
Rejoicing with our ancient hum of contemplation,
Our church and nursery hung with votive seed-pearls,
Hymning. There I taste
With my whole soul,'' says he,
''Which is my body, I smell with my eyes;
Odour is scenery, scenery is odour;
I scan the green grass which has travelled
Again and again through meadows,
In continuous present,'' ''But,'' said I,
''You can speak, and think; that seems
To separate you from your joys, how can
You give yourself utterly?'' ''Eigh?'' asked the fly,
''What was I saying then? Please remind me.''

THE FUNERAL

(For N.)

I.

Clouds and mountains were invited, both the conscious
And the unconscious creatures. The trees
Like visible outpourings of the stream's music,

The urine of the animals in the dawn frost
Puffing like rifle-fire. The dark meat of the sun,
the bloody meat, the flowering sun.

II.

Ninety-two percent of what we eat is from direct
Pollination by the bees, he tells me this
To cheer me and if true ninety-two percent
Of what he says with his mouth is said by bees. The first light
On leaves looks like apples hanging in the trees,
The whole forest a vast orchard, and all things
Are more than they seem, for they may fly away,
And disappear like Mother pausing on the threshold
Of the fields of light, which are like dew
Thick in the grassy meadows, for the light hangs
Dripping in the leaves, stands on the wind.

III.

There is a Watcher, I think, who has magnetic wings.
First it seemed to me at the funeral service with the terrible
Useless brass handles that would be saved screwed to
The veneer cardboard coffin that was much too small
That my emotions such as these swirled round my flesh
And some of them spurted from my eyes but ninety-two percent
Were beating in my back in a sensation like spread wings.
Since mine were sprouting I was able to see
The wings of others, such as my father's, standing next to me,
And his were ragged and tattered like those of an old moth
Close to drying up and drifting away, it seemed my duty
To merge my birth-wet wings with his, and this I did,
Entwining them in an embrace with him that he would never know,
And sure enough he, the widower, perked up,

And I felt tattered, but not dry, for back at the house
I sobbed my heart out in the little white-tiled loo,
And there was still a little angelic witness lodged in my spine
At the small of my back, in Jesus-robes, little calm watcher
In white, which I cannot explain, merely report.

IV.

The other thing the funeral showed me, unpromising seance,
My Mother, subject of it, at the door ajar
On the field of light, looking back over her shoulder,
Smiling happiness and blessing me, the coherent veil
Of the radiant field humming with bees that lapped the water, and she bent
And washed her tired face away with dew and became a spirit.

SOME MUSIC

The mountains that steer the wind,
And when it blows many hours
The seaway is heavy

As the note of a bell increases
The longer it is rung. The pylons
March over the land, like the X-rays

Of cathedrals, their choir
Ghostly, they hum
And crackle, full of ghost.

There is a pad of moss
Crouched in the gutter like a green-gold mouse
Hunting in a sunny tunnel,

All the green-gold pads of moss
Drink thirstily the sunlight,
The tufts and buns in the Falmouth gutters.

The wind is is searching out the resonance
of everything, the whips are still
And the wind whistles, the timbers

Of the rafters strain and hum
In their grain like wires
Stretched from telephone to telephone

And the house flexes,
The perfume messages
Stripped from that bush mark

The surface of that lake
In which they record and infuse. Look
How that great cool-plum cloud

Vaults the horizon, it has
A toiling skin on it
Like plum-forests full of juice,

Toiling in its wind of resonancy,
Cloud full of creamy hail
And mild radio lightning.

Now it rains
like a plum without a skin, the ships
Chatter with their radios

And glide over the water
As a bow chirps on its violin,
And gives out harmonies which touch the shore,

And there is a pad of moss
the size of a horse
Green-gold stallion on this cliff-bank.

THE IMPOSSIBILITY, THE NO-BODY

The impossibility, the water-walker,
The No-body. The windcells

Like footprints on the water,
Skaters of the wind. An Impossibility,

Like a man who stops at his rippling shoulders,
The headless God, or God with his head

Far away in the sky, or surrounding us all
Closer than we can see, God-head, his limbs

Deep in the ocean, the God who reclines on the floods,
Headless. These extraordinary rains are caused

By the enemy of man. When it was found
After the flash of lightning that she was pregnant

It was blamed on the rain splashing upwards,
She had gone out in it barefoot and pantless,

She wished to affirm, and therefore was pregnant,
Two-headed, with her secret sharer. When he was born

And grew to manhood, the glory on his face,
We mistook it for oil, like water that does not break.

He had dreamed that he was bathing in the Fal
When the rains came, but he had opened his mouth

And lifted his head and drunk up
All the excess waters and thus prevented floods.

So then, wheat grains big as pigeons' eggs,
The air feminine and the water desirous of copulation,

The sea hedgehogging the light, our range of mountains
That rip the rainclouds open, called the Cascades.

The glory dazzled us, in the sunlight, so we could not see
His head for the brightness, the mirror-face,

That was black, so that in the darkness also
It went and he walked headless, Impossibility,

Born of the rain rebounding from the earth,
White man with blackface, the black with a white man's body.

CHILDHOOD THOUGHTS

I was in the Treasury, Mother, it was as sexual
As eating snails. Who was the dog, really?
His turd on the path dispensing abominable
Loud-mouthed droning resurrectors. A wall-eyed dolly.
Gnats bony as winged whippets. The bronze flush
on peaches, silvery down; the butter of the cloud-ocean
With Churning Mountain set down on our rainy doorstep.
The zest, the yest, the yeast of autumn on the air,
Its mud a cross between a shit and a yeast,
Clean-dirty, the two truths of spunk and shit.
The bees a kind of yeast, all yellow
With their pollen, waxy. The boiling gnats,
the thin fume; moths like silver cigars
With smoky wings. That thin silver blouse
Like metal sculpture. The moths in silvery blouses
They cannot take off, hanging up on mirrors
Of black emptiness, the windowpanes, through which
The moon turns into an immense powdery moth whose silver dust
Falls on us. I was in the Treasury again, mother.
Who was the dog? There are three big bulging sheep

Caught on the side of the hill, no, they are steps
Of the waterfall, the water woolen with its force.
As the sheepdog loped by, you turned
And the lights caught at your blouse, like the two doors
Bombed slantwise of a treasury, plated with melt.

NAN'S LAST SEANCE

The gold-searching ants nip up the knotty grains
Of pure gold from the glassy sand, ripe grains,
They pile them in flashing ziggurats,
They are themselves gold-sheened as the summer flies are,
Yellow as wheat on the wing;
The rocks break out in flowers.

Five men dancing in gold silk hats
Spun from the maggot of the mother.
The gold folds to the bottom of the copper pan,
Gold on green like the frogs,

Then there is the black and yellow,
The deep earth-oil and its flame;

The earth-toad and the water-frog,
The toad filled with black oil,
The frog with blood of vivid summer water.

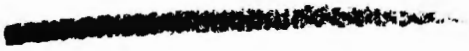
All the favorite creatures came.
These are the soliloquies of the undertaker's game;
Depression as a state of prayer.
I shall pray to her with the names of things;
Bring the name and the thing together,
And a third matter
Shoots forth like a flame.

A written mirror, like a field of wheat
In the wind, the text on the page
Rippling and creating images
In its vibratory surface,

Or the words are a yeast added to the vat,
I drink from it and I see more strangely,

I saw a yellow horse of sunset
Galloping across the green hill.
The quotation from Paul
Turned the funeral into a seance.

The written mirror,
The written flames,
The written snowfalls
Sink down, the coffin burns
To pictures in the gold flames.



Diane Ward

THE FOURTH OF JULY IS GEOGRAPHY

Want yours. Street's passion where the worst
that can happen is death without love
quick, anonymous, if not anonymous,
insignificant. This one's dedicated.
Around nobody, my feet flop like fish
on the pavement, July, starting over,
hot. Mothers with baby-worlds
to clothe. Girls with a boy-world
to feed. Sensation, a world that nods
to be fed without hesitaitng, people,
empty, shoes on plywood stands, cheap.
West, the pavement converges into the
river, east I see the same. I turn
left, am left. A holiday that's a real
estate holiday. I touched you, what
if your face changed, flinch. A man
looks at his watch, down the block, back
to his watch. His shirt clean, pink,
white buttons. His mind is clean,
he's innocent, wanted something, he could
want, forget himself or his impression,
shallow furrow, on the world to which he
belonged. Wasn't too small, poor, even
too anxious, wasn't even there

until another person thought he was.
He took that light and waited. Green
to turn to red. The Deli to get crowded
then empty. Skinny, young, preoccupied,
middle age, wealthy, lonely, relax.
Whatever you dreamed possible, terrible,
plastered all over him like clay
on his armature, notation that never
expanded into sentence.

So touch, need to talk, manipulate,
to flatter, cajole, to appreciate,
to rescue, stand up for, follow
behind, to follow up, surround, to hold
onto, elevate, penetrate, to expose,
pursue and manage to stand still and
keep moving, to include each other
in the color scheme, each cover
story, employees of the past-destroyers
and the future deniers, brave ones,
most afraid ones, you get a part
(I made them up) and I have
a part of them. Nothing but affectionate
isolation of events. I will subject you,
how will we ever care, to these affectionate
spots. Transformed into six years, twelve,
eighteen years and more as your shoulder falls
retreating. Beyond your need, you're
vertical, all cushions of calm,
and contribution. A life yearned for
obsolescence. No real time of its own,
it seemed to go on forever. Apathy bulged
and never kept track of itself. The life
would pass itself in a long hallway, turn

off the lights for a moment. It got into
elevators and pressed all the buttons
to witness a steady stream of gaping
alienation. Life didn't last forever.
Both inevitable like an embryo dubbed
baby and fanatical like that part of Pollock
that painted circles around his own death.
Life became increments of five that would
culminate in a random and uncontrollable
grand sum. It wanted the urgency
of an original thought, the humility of a long
effort that failed. It no longer admired
the speed of the newest model, it didn't
contemplate lying down in front of it.
It's fabric was silk woven into concentric
circles of lace.

I see through her eyes. She thinks non-stop
carnivals of pure answers. She thinks
I should finish the food, say something,
go on so I can regain the rest of my body.
I should gesture with my left hand, put
down the fork, cross my legs, scratch one
palm with the other, fondle my bracelet.
I don't wear a bracelet, she wasn't looking
at me, I'm surprised, I was caught
vulnerable, half-dimensional, suspended for
so long. I can't figure out how many
people didn't notice what just tortured me.
Long minutes, heads bobbing above my terrain,
the little conquerer, constant paddler, up
barely. What we need: audience every night
even when we can't embrace them. I could work
harder, I was born with the lack. Every tiny

word and thought struggles for me. Absolute,
as if on a screen, the scene in trouble, my lines
are repeated many times, in and out of focus,
boring the audience, they fall out, they're
militarly. It's economics, I'm losing.
Only one is left now so I fall in love.
We try very hard to understand, care, and not
appear silly. It's our show now that's watched.
Whoever is left this time will be in our next
scene. Now we're a group known as group,
interesting to ourselves, our admirers,
too big to accept every lingering soul, we're
happy, romantic.

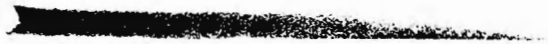
I was lifting the spoon to my mouth when
my hand became a clatter of millions
of teeth gnashing, my fork the arching
letter C, the bite of food enormous, mangled
organic matter, and I, a mouth and a brain
connected by a tiny thread, my body gone.
The room surrounded, contaminated its
occupants, their complete bodies' brains
formed words, mouths spoke, hands all gaily
gestured, gracefully moved to the eating act.
I stood out, a wall of paint chips, faulty
when noticed, so insignificant no one noticed.
I'm making up my mind and it's ridiculous.
It's going to be a life led hugging
a wall of undetermined height. But a good
wall with a structure of patience. Nobody
died building it, nobody died against it
Hugging meant perspective, not wallowng.
A few lost gambles, and the life was going
to take place instead in a benevolent

cocoon, an airplane that never inflicted
taking off or landing, a lamp that defined space
with the authority of people who know
their purpose, feel it's worthwhile, never
doubt definition. Soon ludicrous, the darkness
plowed a maze of irrigation ditches for itself,
left messages on its answering machine.
The life was lost, its squatters fingered
satin possibilities, returned melted to
statements drifting, floating, watching.
The life was illuminated blue, a tv
in a dark room, full of symbolism, hints
of itself, words.

The pin-up shot, 2 runners, it left me.
I've seen myself much higher, end to end,
their length measuring a clean yes, strings
tuned to each other, the best when I'm left
in a sound continuing until it's forgotten,
listening until it's drifted away to a point
I lent you. Far away, memory, my corresponding
ivory. If I do fall around you in phrases,
it's childhood, secure, unsure, shedding
honesty, logging in intensity. Your diagonal
gaze, a trick of tired peripheral vision, a page
mid-way through a novel, not sure yet. A hand and
nothing else, an exercise which tries
to not know but touch. This floor slopes
down so that the table resting on it, the books
weighting the table slant down toward
the south, people called guys who stand up
straight on the American plain, China like
a missile down below, Australia like a train
disappearing as a dot, New Zealand like punctuation

Britain like a flower preserved by a florist
with a Phd, Heaven like a joke followed
by nervous laughter, and Iceland, a woman
I dream about whose face is blue, whose clothes
are white and only sharp blue line-drawings
describe her

That's me as a maniac, lifting ther words I can
reach, using them to imagine, topographical
position, the 7th floor. Looking down,
two people walk below toward the west and say:
''Yea, I like him, I've known him a long time.''
Three people down below, heading east, pass
the two, loot the conversation, and initiate
the phrase: ''I like him and I like like like
him I know him, it's been a long, long time
I like him, I know, like enough.''



Janet Rodney

LOST IN THOUGHT

Summer 1983

There is
light too in this shadow

where seeds crack open
with joy for life,

heartroots driving
toward water,

rage & betrayal
of those never meant

to survive,
they seemed so central.

Surely there was never
a land

more harsh than this,
more loving of minimal life.

*

Not a woman
yet colors
transcending color
& rhythm

of waves
breaking on an island
(no man is
unto—
a song
and, strangely,
stone's silence.

Not woman as merely
seen but human
being marked
by stars
emerges from
surf & swirl, sand,
sea-rubbed skin's
fire.

Not hands or feet
as you would
think
nor eyes nor lips,
but body of arcs
& angles in motion,
wisdom's, & de-
meter's precision,
earth unlocking
attention
to the word.

*

Deciduous
& in
the body of language

life's material
losing
essence: definitions
fall/round
& round
disks of
green on green's
deep note
spring into view,
find voice
to transparent
the wall,
open
on a lens

*

What the eye needs
is form
a question
turning towards
(& heart's attention
to) what lies
someplace
where she is

an image

to infect
minute patterns
of other
things (not
what they seem)

& re-vision
how words

might describe
(her)
    view.

*

Momentarily
under trees
earth's smell
deep
invites her down
alive

a life

she can carry
for a while,
a life's literal
web & interplay
of being whatever
(it) is, directly
hers.

*

Perhaps she has
already
run thru that pain
(no doctor can heal)
that of

an imagined life,
untouchable dream

of being
here & now

able to say

"I am so full
of everything,"

reconcile
its loss,
letting go

in time.

*

but to see
a dark thing
come out of spring
's calyx
open & upside
down

(you'd have to
leap up
& touch)

the flower
at the top
of an arch,
pure white
alabaster
texture,

look down
& hear the cries
of the world.

*

Flung now
vermillion
fins

drive sun's
shaft where
standing
lost in thought
she fills a
(recrudescent)
terra
cotta
globe,

light's language
thrown flat
on water

re-minding
an old dimension,
swift flight
toward fall.

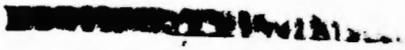
*

Those colors
peripheral
as silence
behind sound

plunge words
down

where she can
measure
limits of (that)
vision

& go around it.



Susan Howe

Six Poems

Brute affirmation

Systems tumbled in heaps

Sanctuary to seize
Sage rattling insight haggling for vision

Scheme of providence
scheme for redemption

Question and confusion
Calm dissolution approaching near morning

The skirts of Saints
shudder us safely to necessity

Sackcloth
Reproover in far reaches of dumb shame

Similitude

Dogged Cartesian
Great leaps of statement and proof

Reverence of mock reverence

Some system of coherence

Shadowy and corporeal communication
Somnambulism sketching

Speech hates its father and mother

Snow water when spring is over

Power and predecessor
Stubble hands join

King Chain followed by mimic and buffoon

Corruptible first figure
Bright armies wolves warriors steers

scorned warning captive compulsion

Love leads to edge
Progress of Self into illusion

Same and not the same
Cherubim intone their own litany

Universal separation
—Distant coherent rational system

Vault lines divergence
Atom keysone

Parmenides' prohibition
End of passageway perceive surrounding

Consciousness grasps its subject
Stumbling phenomenology

infinite miscalculation of history

Great men thicker than their stories
sitting and standing

to mark suns rising and setting
Ridges of sand rising on one another

Mathematics of continua

fathomless infinitesimal fraction
sabbatical safety beyond seven

Empty arms cloud counterfeit

Antecedent terror stretched to a whisper

Double penetrable foreign sequel
By face to know helm

Prey to destroy in dark theme
Emblem of fictitious narrative

Step and system

Collision and impulsion
Asides and reminders to myself

Lives to be seen pressing and alien

Fix fleeting communication

Carried away before a pursuer
Demonstration in a string of definitions

To walk a little
Night's kingdom lamentation dimming

Snatched idiom
Recollection fallen away from ruin

Slide into elect unalterable

slipping from known to utmost bound

Wound doe and hind
Wounded errors wound others

Paper plague odd ends reap

Faint legend is day
Mahomet touched a flower with the tips

of his fingers
Face of the voice of speech

Flaming heart on the extended hand
Sky red and lowering

Mountains pitched over to westward

Light inaccessible as darkness
Irradiation of infinite

Principles judgements must connect
Soul lying awake in sleep

Parabolic scholar
Follower

Hail of witches on heath
Wars under the earth

Day cut off
Or summer's rose

Quicksand swallows the bottom

Leaf carried out of invisible hearing
Acoustic signature

prefiguration
Degree of weight and absolute light

Summer has come again
mute time remarked it

Deep generations of the old pass over
Surging and separating

Flame choristers shuddering flame
Self formed in line

Linear theme
prefiguration without premeditation

Vision sweeps away

Immeasurable distance farthest Hebrides

Caused the universe
Contained the universe

Rugged solacing on surge sheltering

Offering or gesture of offering
Imagery and imagery

Jig green revelry

Invisible festival
halves drawn into a circle

feigned necessity vanished from memory

Clay and country
merry and making merry

merry and making Captive

Hymn to the light
hymn and psalm to the light

Eight points of a compass

mosaic pattern eastward dispelled

Summoner's slip into ritual
Planctus of Rachel

Shadowy figures of the Magi
elongated figures troping in stone

Parallel columns
Geographical assertions

Straw mother heaved higher and higher
Self ceded to sphere

Pull world around streets
Prosper our journey

Class structure belonging to shelter

migratory odd scrap trilogy

Laughter hallows the house in summer
Thin home hover in theme

Bound Cupid sea washed

Omen of stumbling
Great unknown captaincy

centuries roam audible silence
whissing days roam own key

second time somewhere
seclusion in symbol sovereign

Memory mutinies contours cling

Mother my name
pin-eyed children

sundial lair from mortal fear

hooed Peru

Prisoned stone guardian
guerdon of resurrection

fictitious deeps

Cries open to the words inside them
cries hurled through the Woods

Pierre Joris

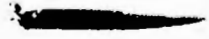
GERMAN LANDSCAPE REVISITED

after Holderlin

well-hung
with yellow pears, a
mountain of wild roses
drags
the land into the lake
you staunch swans
you're loaded
with kisses
you drop
your heads into
the sacro-saint spill.

Goddamn
it all where do I score
in winter
for flowers where
for sunshine
& the shade the earth
throws?

The walls they
just stand there
speechless & cold
the wind
in vain chases
the weather.

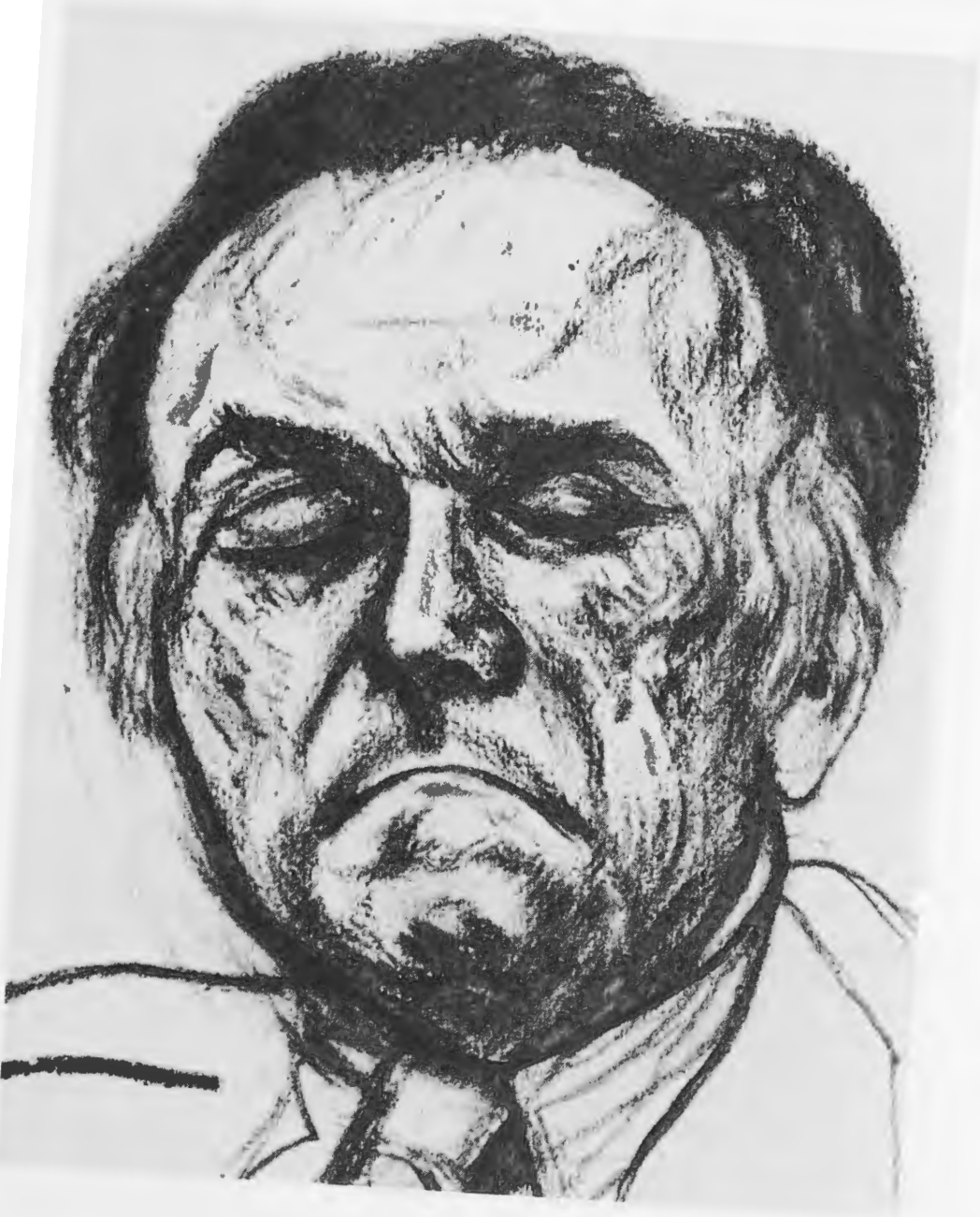


R. B. Kitaj

Yona in Paris
charcoal on paper, 22½ "x15 "

Arikha in Paris
charcoal drawing

Ted in Paris
charcoal drawing



Duncan in Paris
charcoal drawing

Tim in Paris
charcoal drawing

Sandra in Paris
charcoal drawing

David Plante

PARIS, 1983

From my diary

January 26, 1983
In Paris, Hotel Michelet Odeon.

Every time I come to Paris, I think of the first time I came, almost twenty-five years ago. So, when the taxi from the airport went round the Place de la Concorde, I thought of my first taxi ride round the Place de la Concorde with the man from the boat. I'd taken a package through customs for him, and he'd met the boat train at the Gare St. Lazare to collect it. I had no hotel to go to, and he took me to his. I was both frightened and willing to risk anything to get to know what I imagined a secret Paris. But I never even learned what was in the square, flat package. The man disappeared after he got me a room. I myself had to find out the secrets of Paris. On my first walk I saw a poster of a 19th Century view of the city with Les Secrets de Paris in big black letters below. I was nineteen in 1959.

Before unpacking this evening, I rang Kitaj and Sandra, and they told me to meet them at a brasserie on rue des Ecoles for dinner.

I said, "I used to live on rue des Ecoles when I was a student in Paris!"

I had lived there during a period of great discovery in my life, a period closely associated with discovering Paris. To go into the Cluny Museum, around the corner from where I lived was like going into myself, and, in a sense, it was going

into myself, into my remote past, that of my French Jansenist ancestors. Because, knowing nothing about them but that they came from France, who was to say my ancestors didn't come from Paris? I wanted to possess all the city.

My longing to possess the city, perhaps to possess myself, pressed me to strange excesses. I left ritualistically my most essential traces in toilets, on restaurant napkins, on hotel towels and sheets. I imagined there was, going on in small rooms up creaky wooden stairs or down worn stone spiral stairs, something secret which I must know, which, if I knew it, would make me understand everything about myself and the world.

Kitaj and Sandra were already by a window at the table covered with a stiff white cloth, the napkins stiff and white, too. I hadn't seen them in months, when I had last had dinner at their house in London. I embraced them over the table.

They've been living in Paris for over half a year. They said they see few people, and work.

They became, for a moment, strange, and I noticed things about them I hadn't noticed before, or had lost sight of. Sandra sits up straight, looking right at you, smiling with her red lips open, her eyes bright, her long, dark hair loose about her shoulders. It is as if to be attentive for her is to smile. Kitaj's deafness seems worse than ever, so he has to lean close, his elbows on the table, his right or left ear turned towards you as he tries to look at you at the same time, but as he can't quite manage this he has to keep turning his head at different angles. Attentive, he frowns and presses his lips together. His beard is almost all white.

We ordered.

Kitaj, who doesn't drink alcohol, asked for coca cola.

I told them what I'd been thinking about Paris as a secret.

Kitaj said he first came to the city when he, too, was nineteen, in 1952. With the hesitant way he speaks, often clearing his throat and hitching up a shoulder as if to put a muscle back in place, he told me he wanted to come to Europe because of writers he'd read who had found Europe a revelation of creativity, and one of those writers was of course Hemingway. He knew that a great creative flowering, equal to that of 5th Century Greece or Renaissance Florence, had occurred in Paris over a period of, say, a hundred years, and he wanted to go

where so many of his compatriots had gone and, there, produced amazing works. But when he got here he found something else: Paris only seven years removed from German occupation; "And imagine what it felt like," he said, "to walk down a street and know that people there had been pulled out by the Gestapo and sent off to concentration camps. It was, really, my first awareness of being a Jew. At home, I was brought up with little awareness of being Jewish. Europe made me aware of something I hadn't expected. I'd expected something else."

I said "You know, even for me, some seven or eight years younger than you, and not Jewish, the war became the deepest secret of Paris, of Europe. I'd look at the bullet-strafed walls with incomprehension. I'd come to look at the buildings, and I was looking more at the effects of the war on the buildings."

Kitaj said that he'd spent only a few days in Paris, then he took the Orient Express to Vienna, and there it was as if the war had ended the day before he arrived. In Vienna he saw American jeeps being driven around, and in the jeeps soldiers from each of the Four Powers. His grandmother, who was born in Vienna but went to America, had inherited a chemist's shop in Vienna that'd been taken over by the Nazis; the reparation money Kitaj himself collected from a lawyer representing his grandmother, just enough money to live on while he studied at the art academy. The lawyer lived in a medieval court yard. Once a week, Kitaj would go to his flat for the money. The flat was over a Soviet barracks, and after lights out Kitaj and the lawyer would go into the bathroom to listen to the soldiers singing in darkness. People wore the same clothes they had worn during the war. He remembers people in the streets grovelling for food, and the great number of beggars.

I said I wondered if our greatest cultural experience in Europe was of a war we never experienced. I had never thought of this till now.

Kitaj said he got even closer to the war—as if, in Europe, he wanted to get as close as possible to it—when he went to Spain. He said, "I was brought up in a Left-Liberal 30's atmosphere. Two of my mother's boy friends were killed in the Spanish Civil War. I remember jumping off a bus onto the Spanish earth, so deep with Hemingway and everything I'd heard in my youth, all of that pressed beneath the repressive surface of Franco's regime. That gave me the sense of a great secret."

And now, I said, I worry that the memory of that past war has gone from Europe. I worry, not really because I believe if the war is forgotten the restraint the memory of it imposes may go and there'll be another war, but because in some strange way, it is the memory of the war which keeps me in Europe. Even now, when I come across unexpected evidence of it, as a few years ago when I was in the Ardennes and found, walking through a forest, a moss-covered memorial commemorating the execution in the forest of French fighters, I feel something move in me, and I am close to what I, an American war baby, know instinctively is the greatest happening in my life, however far, in space and time, I was from it. Just because I was so far from it, it is, that vast and deep experience, incomprehensible. I still can't imagine daily life during the war, and I wonder about it. But it is going, has to all great extent gone, the memory of the war, from Europe. And as it goes, a lot of what I discovered was my deepest feeling for Europe goes.

Kitaj said, "And what do you think an American Jew feels in Europe?"

I raised my hands.

He said, "You talk about the secrets of Paris, of Europe." He put his hands behind his head and raised his arms, and as he did he spoke from the side of his mouth as his left eye narrowed. "Perhaps there are no secrets now. But I make it my business to invent a secret Paris, even if it doesn't exist, or only partially. I have two secret cities here." He leaned forward and put his elbows on the table edge, and again he spoke from the side of his mouth, often stretching his neck as if he were wearing a tight collar, or hitching his shoulder to ease a suspender strap. He was wearing an open shirt and an unbuttoned jacket. "The first secret," he said, "has to do with sex. I first visited the red light district, along the rue St. Denis, about thirty years ago, and it hasn't changed a great deal, or at least I tell myself it hasn't. A few of the women there are beautiful." He stretched his neck and laughed. "They renew themselves like sperm all up and down that mile long street. I find places there where I can lose myself in forgetfulness. I usually go to bed early, but a couple of nights during the month I'll disappear into St. Denis. Sandra knows about it. I have no secrets from her. There, I can create my own Paris, and savour the sexual flavour of the place. I go to restaurants, bars, among whores and pimps, and I write or sketch. One reason why I came to Paris is to enjoy the myths, even if I have to half create them. Sex is a myth.

"And the other secret Paris," he said, sitting back in his chair, but with his hands on the table, "is what is left of Jewish Paris. In the Marais, deep in the Marais, is the Plaetzel, the area where Jews still have their own separate culture, and Sandra and I will have a meal, once a week, in a Kosher restaurant there. What is it called?"

"Joe Goldenberg," Sandra said.

"You can see," Kitaj said, "how easy it was for the Nazis to round up the Jews in that area of narrow streets. Every time I go into it, I think of that, wonder about it. Being in Europe has made me wonder. Not a day passes when I'm not involved, wondering, frightened. This doesn't need invention. We don't have many friends here except for the painter Avigdor Arikha and his wife Anne, who are Jews. And with Anne I went to Drancy, which was a concentration camp for Jews just outside Paris where they were sent before being sent off to the death camps. Avigdor, who was in a concentration camp, didn't want to come. Anne is American. Drancy is a Communist working class area. The buildings of the camp, originally 30's buildings, are now council flats. There is a monument to the Jews, an 11th rate piece of sculpture. That's all. There's no coincidence between good art and such—"

He sat back, blinking, not both eyes together, but one after another. He appeared to have suddenly forgotten what we were talking about. He looked out.

I asked Sandra when she'd first come to Europe.

"In 1969," she said, "to Paris."

Selfconsciously, I asked, "Why did you come?"

She clapped her hands together and pressed them into her lap so her shoulders were raised, and she leaned her elongated body a little to one side. Hesitant, as if worried about what she would say, she smiled at me.

"I guess it's an impossible question," I said.

"I suppose," she said, "I never really felt comfortable in America. There, I'd always had an idea, from books and films, that there would be something I'd find in Europe that wouldn't be alien to me. In Los Angeles, I painted in the mornings before going to work. I dreamed of coming to Europe to be a painter.

When I came to Paris that first time it was only for a visit, but I spent all my time in the Louvre. I was determined to come back to Europe to live. Now that we're in Paris for a whole year, I go to the Louvre and sketch as often as possible.''

''Did you have an image of Paris before you came?''

''From pictures and from what I'd read. Talking about Hemingway—my studio is on the rue Rollin, just off the Place de la Contrescarpe, where Hemingway lived in the 20's. The neighbourhood is still the same, at least the same as his descriptions, even to the merchant selling charcoal and wood. I heat my studio with a wood fire. I don't feel sentimental about some lost European culture, and find contemporary life anywhere most fascinating, but I sense there are here so many references to the past that are still alive. A plate of oysters and a glass of wine are reinforced by literature.''

''So you weren't disappointed when you came?''

''No. If you look, you can see in Paris what Manet, Cézanne, Matisse saw. You see the light on the buildings at different times of the day, and you imagine the choices the artists made. Of course, Avigdor says the city was ruined when the cafés changed, began to disappear, sometime in 1964—''

I said, ''I wonder how much we know about modern France, or, even, modern England, where we've lived so long.''

''Twelve years,'' Sandra said.

''How long have you lived in Europe, Kitaj?''

''What?'' he asked.

I asked him again.

''25 years,'' he said.

''And I, twenty.''

After our supper, which was reflected in many mirrors, I left with Sandra and Kitaj to walk with them to their apartment, near the Seine, on what Kitaj said was one of the oldest streets in Paris, the rue Galande. His studio, the largest room in the apartment, has stone walls and a well like a medieval courtyard.

By the well is an easel. Paved with lithograph stones, the floor has large sheets of paper strewn on it. Kitaj picked up the sheets to show me soft-ground etchings of people and drawings of himself in Paris.

I asked him if there was any art being shown which I should see.

Kitaj said, "Not that I know of. Paris seems to have a life of the mind, what with all the book shops, but there are no artists. It pleases me that there's no painting going on. As far as I know, there is only Avigdor. He is the greatest artist-scholar alive, and he is my mentor here. I see him every other day."

"For myself," I said, "it's not what's going on in the world of European writing that's keeping me in Europe. My writing isn't at all connected to anything happening here."

Kitaj said, "If what you're talking about is what's finished for you in Europe, what's really finished for me is my affair with Mediterranean-centered European culture. That's all gone for me."

And yet, I said, European culture *does* exist. Having lived in Europe so long, I wondered if we'd become used to that culture, so didn't see it, as we didn't, or I didn't, see American culture before coming abroad. Not that we'd become European, but we were no longer selfconscious about being Americans in Europe.

"Are we used to it?" Kitaj asked. "No, I don't think so. I think it was never ours for the having. It was and is an alien culture in which I had and have no business. Were Hemingway and all kidding themselves in their affair with Europe? I don't know."

"Then why do we stay?" I asked.

"Habit," Kitaj said. "And habits are not simple. They're as complex as love affairs. Also, there is quite a good precedent for working away from where you were born and brought up."

"Do you ever think of going back to America?"

He indicated a fraction of a measurement between his thumb and index finger. "I'm about that far away from deciding to go. Sandra likes it here. That's maybe my main reason for staying."

"Why did you come to Paris for a year?" I asked.

"To savour the place," he asid. "To get a taste of it."

"Not to possess it?"

"No. Not really. My way of possessing a city is by walking around it for a short time. I possess it for myself. I may do some pictures based on European cities. I may. I don't know yet."

I said I'd go.

As he was showing me out, Kitaj said, "Did I tell you I discovered that we're living over a medieval Jewish cemetery? Right under our feet are Jewish bones."

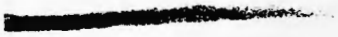
On my way back to my hotel, I walked along the Seine, and, passing Shakespeare and Company, saw its window lit up, and went in. It was shoddy. I knew it was not the original. I could not imagine this place generating anything. I listened to two Americans in the bookshop talking; one worked there and the other was a friend, and the one who worked there was sitting at a big table covered with used books, a gas fire hissing under the table, and he was saying, "I'm a poet. It doesn't matter what job I have to make money, because that's secondary to my job as a poet." His friend said, "But you can't excuse your problems, your really serious problems, by calling yourself a poet." I transposed myself and the young poet, and I imagined I said exactly what he'd said when I was his age living in Paris. I was once in a bookshop with a friend, both of us Americans in Paris, and I said to him, as an admission I had never made to anyone else, "I'm going to write books." He said "Bull shit." I laughed. Why did it surprise me that young Americans still come to Paris to be poets and writers? Perhaps, if I were their age, I, too, would want to come. But I could not imagine what their sense of Europe was. It is not mine. I left the bookshop and wandered up the Boulevard St. Michel, wondering what I should do, as it was only 10:30. Then I thought I'd come back to my hotel room and write all this.

January 28

This morning, I went to the Cluny Museum. I went through the medieval rooms, filled with school children, down a flight of stone steps, and, down more steps, into a high-vaulted Roman bath, where there was no one, and all I could hear was distant traffic, as from another world. The walls, small rough stones tightly fitted together— No, I'm forgetting as I try to recall. This is the important part: at the far left of this great hall was an archway, and through it and down some worn stone steps I went to a lower level, at the edge of which was a railing separating it from a very deep level, long and narrow, at the bottom of which were large, broken sarcophagi, one with crosses carved on the lid, and to the right of this deep room was a doorway with steps leading to an even deeper level, but I could not see in any deeper than the stone stairs which appeared to descend into nothing but darkness.

With a sense of loss and fear—a fear that something one thought most important no longer refers to one—I no longer imagine there are secrets, secrets which have to do with my past or my present, in Europe. I have no need to possess the statues and pictures, the books, the cafés, the squares, the expanding cities. And this is something of a relief, especially since my greatest impulse to possess was to possess people at the cafés in the squares—

This comes to me, and it is so naive I am embarrassed by it, but here it is: that we came to Europe looking for secrets because we, as Americans, have such a deep sense of what is secret. All my youth, I believed that America had no secrets and that I had to go to another country for them. but now I know that the deepest secrets are American, and in America.



Sandra Fisher

Joey Reading Baudelaire in Paris 1983
oil on canvas, 10″x8″

Hiroyuki in Paris 1983
oil on canvas, 10″x8″

John Ashbery

Six Haibun

HAIBUN 1

Wanting to write something I could think only of my own ideas, though you surely have your separate, private being in some place I will never walk through. And then of the dismal space between us, filled though it may be with interesting objects, standing around like trees waiting to be discovered. It may be that this is the intellectual world. But if so, what poverty—even the discoveries yet to be made, and which shall surprise us, even us. It must be heightened somehow, but not to brutality. That is an invention and not a true instinct, and this must never be invented. Yet I am forced to invent, even if during the process I become a songe-creux, inaccurate dreamer, and these inventions are then to be claimed by the first person who happens on them. I'm hoping that homosexuals not yet born get to inquire about it, inspect the whole

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Note: *haibun* is a Japanese form which I discovered in the excellent anthology of Japanese poetry called *From the Country of Eight Islands*, edited and translated by Hiroaki Sato and Burton Watson (Anchor Books, 1981). Its glossary defines *haibun* as "prose written by *haikai* poets in such a way as to complement various stylistic and aesthetic features of *haikai* poetry." The examples in the collection consist of a prose passage with a *haiku* at the end. The translators have rendered the *haiku* throughout the anthology as an unpunctuated, single line with a varying amount of syllables. I used this method in the "37 Haiku" which were published in a previous issue of *Sulfur*.—J.A.

random collection as though it were a sphere. Isn't the point of pain the possibility it brings of being able to get along without pain, for a while, of manipulating our marionette-like limbs in the straitjacket of air, and so to have written something? Unprofitable shifts of light and dark in the winter sky address this dilemma very directly. In time to come we shall preceive them as the rumpled linen or scenery through which we did walk once, for a short time, during some sort of vacation. It is a frostbitten, brittle world but once you are inside it you want to stay there always.

The year—not yet abandoned but a living husk, a lesson

HAIBUN 2

. . . and can see the many hidden ways merit drains out of the established and internationally acclaimed containers, like a dry patch of sky. It is an affair of some enormity. The sky is swathed in a rich, gloomy and finally silly grandeur, like drapery in a portrait by Lebrun. This is to indicate that our actions on this tiny, tragic platform are going to be more than usually infinitesimal, given the superhuman scale on which we have to operate, and also that we should not take any comfort from the inanity of our situation: we are still valid creatures with a job to perform, and the arena facing us, though titanic, hasn't rolled itself beyond the notion of dimension. It isn't suitable, and it's here. Shadows are thrown out at the base of things at right angles to the regular shadows that are already there, pointing in the correct direction. They are faint but not invisible, and it seems appropriate to start intoning the litany of dimensions there, at the base of a sapling spreading its lines in two directions. The temperature hardens, and things like the smell and the mood of water are suddenly more acute, and may help us. We will never know whether they did.

Water, a bossa nova, a cello is centred, the light behind the library

HAIBUN 3

I was swimming with the water at my back, funny thing is it was real this time. I mean this time it was working. We weren't too far from shore, the guides hadn't noticed us yet. Always you work out of the possibility of being injured, but this time, all the new construction, the new humiliation, you have to see it. Guess it's OK to take a look. But a cup of tea—you wouldn't want to spill it. And a grapefruit (spelled "grap-fruit" on the small, painstakingly-lettered card) after a while, and the new gray suit. Then more, and more, it was a kind of foliage or some built-in device to trip you. Make you fall. The encounter with the silence of permissiveness stretching away like a moonlit sea to the horizon, whatever that really is. *They* want you to like it. And you honor them in liking it. You cause pleasure before sleep insists, draws over to where you may yet be. And some believe this is merely a detail. And they may be right. And we may be the whole of which all that truly happens is only peelings and shreds of bark. Not that we are too much more than these. Remember they don't have to thank you for it either.

The subtracted sun, all I'm going by here, with the boy, this new maneuver is less than the letter in the wind

HAIBUN 4

Dark at four again. Sadly I negotiate the almost identical streets as little by little they are obliterated under a rain of drips and squiggles of light. Their message of universal brotherhood through suffering is taken from the top, the pedal held down so that the first note echoes throughout the piece without becoming exactly audible. It collects over different parts of the city and the drift in those designated parts is different from elsewhere. It is a man, it was one all along. No it isn't. It is a man with a conscience of a woman, always coming out of something, turning to look at you, wondering about a possible reward. How sweet to my sorrow is this man's knowledge in his way of coming, the brotherhood that will surely result under now darkened skies.

The pressing, pressing urgent whispers, pushing on, seeing directly

HAIBUN 5

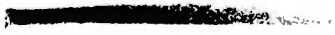
Bring them all back to life, with white gloves on, out of the dream in which they are still alive. Loosen the adhesive bonds that tie them to the stereotypes of the dead, cliches like the sound of running water. Abruptly it was winter again. A slope several football fields wide sprang out of the invisible foreground, the one behind me, and unlaced its barren provocation upwards, with flair and menace, at a 20-degree angle—the ascending night and also the voice in it that means to be heard, a pagoda of which is visible at the left horizon, not meaning much: the flurry of a cold wind. We're in it too chortled the rowanberries. And how fast so much aggressiveness unfolded, like a swiftly-flowing, silent stream. Along its banks world history presented itself as a series of translucent tableaux, fading imperceptibly into one another, so that the taking of Quebec by the British in 1629 melts into the lollipop tints of Marquette and Joliet crossing the mouth of the Missouri River. But at the center a rope of distress twists itself ever tighter around some of the possessions we brought from the old place and were going to arrange here. And what about the courteous but dispassionate gaze of an armed messenger on his way from someplace to someplace else that is the speech of all the old, resurrected loves, tinged with respect, caring to see that you are no longer alone now in this dream you chose. The dark yellowish flow of light drains out of the slanted dish of the sky and from the masses of the loved a tremendous chant arises: We are viable! And so back into the city with its glimmers of possibility like Broadway nights of notoriety and the warm syrup of embarrassed and insistent proclamations of all kinds of tidings that made you what you were in the world and made the world for you, only diminished once it had been seen and become the object of further speculation leading like railroad ties out of the present inconclusive sphere into the world of two dimensions.

A terminus, pole fringed with seaweed at its base, a cracked memory

HAIBUN 6

To be involved in every phase of directing, acting, producing and so on must be infinitely rewarding. Just as when a large, fat, lazy frog hops off his lily pad like a spitball propelled by a rubber band and disappears into the water of the pond with an enthusiastic plop. It cannot be either changed or improved on. So too with many of life's little less-than-pleasurable experiences, like the rain that falls and falls for so long that no one can remember when it began or what weather used to be, or cares much either: they are much too busy trying to plug holes in ceilings or emptying pails and other containers and then quickly pushing them back to catch the overflow. But nobody seems eager to accord ideal status to this situation and I, for one, would love to know why. Don't we realize that after all these centuries that are now starting to come apart like moldy encyclopedias in some abandoned, dusty archive that we have to take the bitter with the sweet or soon all distinctions will be submerged by the tide of tepid approval of everything that is beginning to gather force and direction as well? And when its mighty roar threatens in earnest the partially submerged bridges and cottages, picks up the floundering cattle to deposit them in trees and so on to who knows what truly horrible mischief, it will be time, then, to genuinely rethink this and come up with true standards of evaluation, only it will be too late of course, too late for anything but the satisfaction that lasts only just so long. A pity, though. Meanwhile I lift my glass to these black-and-silver striped nights. I believe that the rain never drowned sweeter, more prosaic things than those we have here, now, and I believe this is going to have to be enough.

Striped hair, inquisitive gloves, a face, some woman named Ernestine Throckmorton, white opera glasses and more



Christopher Dewdney

POINTS IN TIME

Two points stabilize two dimensional space. Three points stabilize a three dimensional object. Four points stabilize four dimensional space. A point is one dimension.

A point in motion is a line. A line in motion is a plane. A plane in motion is a solid. A solid in motion is time.

The quantum theory applies to time, which progresses in small pulses of very short duration. The universe exists as a phantom between pulses. The power of the phenomena existing in one pulse is enough to generate itself through the gap, the interval of non-being, into existence in the next pulse. An event or phenomenon loses a small parcel of energy each time it is propagated through the gap.

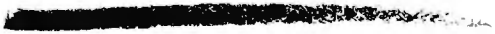
The universe exists and does not exist in regular, rapid succession.

A fixed point in time, or one quanta, stabilizes the continuum, which is how everything happens at once.

THIS MY EMISSARY

Sleep, come
unjoined with me.
I am radiant darkness,
a boundless prison
permeated with escape.
And what little the night recovers
is squandered at dawn.
For the heart has contrived a harm
borne of utter simplicity.

I have passed through the still eye of the storm.
I have seen the full moon in broken pine chiaroscuro
on the freshly fallen snow.
For the eye of the needle
is the still eye of the storm.
And when kneeling she wept
it was in the abject darkness
of total humiliation. This
my emissary
for the great silence.
In her misery we know it.



Martha Lifson

Four Poems

A STILL LIFE

(by Willem Claesz Heda)

An elaborate set of breakfast things, silver
chalice on the cloth, cake and wine
all of it suggesting slippers
down a carpeted floor,
reprieve.

He made it his specialty:
still life breakfasts all the rage in Haarlem,
then (stepping out) put all the staid to shame—
knocking it over—the wine glass a jagged rim,
the pastry torn. It's the danger
in that glass, hands sensing the feel
of silver, the weight of fork,

the possibility
of pain.

A paltry meal and thus more
intrusive, more a boundless edge into
the well-set table, food and meal
of exactly the same length everyday—

what sent them then lurching into morning streets?

dream/embrace

arms about me in that
stable place, the middle
of a dream, you
hold me, are
reality itself so long ago now
I can hardly recall
its shape except inside
a dream where I remember
not only your particular
thighs, but that odd
(portrait seen across
a room) sense of how
it had to be
exactly the way it was
living inside of
it, in the middle not only of
your eyes seeing
to the root of me, but
of how it had to be
so that I stood
always, in the middle of
everything, all meadows
all grass, your arms
warm, not mother or dream
but more than anything
real

HER LOVE CHANGES IT FOR ME

She watches him
through doors she keeps cracked
to see him slide
past.
        His feet almost bare,
her heart aches.

(The most beautiful sight out my window
a cracked cement step beneath
the bow of a tree branch framed

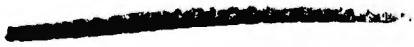
because of this I feel the wind in my breasts
because of this I want to put a dusty leaf
        in my mouth

all that is far approaches slowly towards
the picture plane
and dust blows through
to my eyes

because she lies on her couch, her head
down.

FROM THE IRONIC MARRIAGE SEQUENCE; DIALOGUE

You cannot give me lore of teacups, I know
your kind, she sd.
Sweet Jesus what d'ya think I am
a sissy?
What cravings I've got for painted cups and tea
she moaned, twining herself, legs and all
and gazing: painted green vines, birds, all
beckoned fitfully. Oh, for a story, she sd.
Jesus, I'm
hungry just for food, he clawed.
If you'd read
to me, I'd curl up all around you and sexy
she pulled herself out for him like blooms,
bright splotches on the glaze. I wonder
if it's true, she sd., if they have such birds,
long legs dropping and such an arching wing?
She gazed with vacant eye. Do they have bridges
over goldfish and waterlily pads?
You live in flimsy
dreams, he snapped.
Just looking at my cup, she swirled.



Hans Magnus Enzensberger

Six Poems

Translated from the German by Herbert Graf.

REPORT FROM BONN

Lights still on in the Press Office. The hawker
who touts darkness, ever more darkness,
is being made up for his entrance.
"We're approaching another Middle Ages."
I don't really think so. Although,
how many ashtrays there are in Bad Godesberg alone.
When I think of the Turkish women
who must empty them each night,
ashes to ashes, I feel
in my diaphram region something
like my immortal soul.
All these houses are owned by landlords,
like in the Middle Ages; power is dulling,
so is joy. But pilgrims
are hardly seen, cripples
creeping around the altars are rare.
Nowhere are gallows erected. Traffic lights,

pedestrian malls are there, and instead of lepers
and flagellants, now and then — leading
a fuzzy-haired brown spaniel on the leash —
an elderly hostage in a fur coat
walks by the American Embassy.

MEMORIAL

Now as far as the seventies are concerned,
I can be brief.
Information was always busy.
The miraculous multiplication of the loaves
was limited to Duesseldorf and environs.
The horrible news arrived via telex,
was duly noted, and filed away.

Obediently, by and large,
they've swallowed themselves,
the seventies;
no responsibility taken from the after-born,
the Turks, and the jobless.
For anyone to remember them with kindness
would be asking too much.

SHE'S THIRTY-THREE

It's not at all what she had imagined.
Always these rusting Volkswagens.
Once she'd almost married a baker.
First she read Hesse, later Handke.
Now she often does crosswords in bed.

She won't take anything from men.
For years she was a Trotskyite, in her own way.
She's never had a foodstamp in her hand.
When she thinks of Cambodia, she begins to feel ill.
Her last man friend, the Prof, always wanted a thrashing.
Greenish batik dresses, too large for her;
plant-lice on the araucaria.
Actually, she'd wanted to paint, or emigrate.
her dissertation, *Class Struggle in Ulm, 1500-1512,*
As Reflected in Folk Song:
scholarships, starts, beginnings, a trunkfull of notes.
Sometimes her grandmother sends her money.
In the bathroom, timid dancesteps, little grimaces,
hours with cucumber juice in front of the mirror.
She says, Oh I won't starve.
When she weeps, she looks like nineteen.

THE WHITE COLLAR WORKER

Never has he killed anyone. No,
he knocks over bottles, inadvertently.
He'd like to, he's sweaty, he loses
his favorite key. He's always
catching a cold. He knows he's got to.
He flies off the handle with care.
He thinks: better not. Wedged into
two shoes, he pales and asserts

the contrary. Yes, he checks in
and out. He says the opposite of what he meant
to say. Actually, he says, actually
not. His suit is too tight for him,
too wide. His spot hurts. No,
he hasn't been able to read his own hand
for a long time. He got a divorce,
in vain. Nobody calls him up. All over
he itches. His ballpoint runs dry,
try as he might. He's frequently about,
once in each room, always alone.
When shaving, he cuts himself. Yes,
for he's always watchful, or else
he can't sleep. He sleeps. They've
all got their gripes, they've got to admit,
they've all got the laugh on him. He doesn't
realize what's going on. That much
he realizes. his headaches
are nonpolitical. He fusses,
he's stuttering again, he splutters.
What he'd wanted to say just now he's
forgotten just now. He's forgotten
to kill himself. Try as he might.
Secretly he lives. No, he may not,
but he ought to. He hasn't got cancer,
but that he doesn't know. There's sweat in his hat.
He's never been as well off as
now. He really doesn't want to,
but he must. At the barber's, he weeps. Yes,
he's docile, he's apologetic.
Yes, he writes, yes, he scratches,
yes, he ought to but may not,
no, no one noticed his grief.

THE DIVORCE

At first it was an imperceptible tremor of the skin —
"Whatever you say" — where the flesh is darkest.
"What's wrong?" — Nothing. Opaque dreams
of embraces, but on the morning after
the other looks different, strangely bony.
Razor-sharp misunderstandings. "That time in Rome—"
I never said that. — Pause. Rapidly beating heart,
a kind of hate, strange. — "That's not the point."
Repetitions. Brilliantly clear the certainty:
everything is wrong from now on. Odourless, in focus
like a passport photo, this unknown person
with the tea glass at the table, eyes staring.
It is no use no use no use:
litany in the brain, a touch of nausea.
End of reproaches. Slowly the room
fills up to the ceiling with guilt.
The plaintive voice is a stranger's, but the shoes
that drop with a crash to the floor, the shoes are not.
The next time, in an empty restaurant,
slow motion, breadcrumbs, they talk about money,
laughing. The dessert tastes of metal.
Two untouchables. Strident rationality.
"Things could be much worse." But at night
the vindictiveness, the noiseless struggle, anonymous
like two bony barristers, two big crabs
in the water. Then the exhaustion. Slowly
the scabs peel off. Another tobacconist,
a new address. Pariahs, awfully relieved.
Shadows getting paler. Here are the papers.
Here are the keys. Here is the scar.

SHORT HISTORY OF THE BOURGEOISIE

That was the moment we were
for just five minutes, unaware of it,
immeasurably rich, generously
and electrically, chilled in July
or in case it was November,
the flown-in Finnish logs blazed
in the Palladian fireplaces. Funny,
everything was there, flew in
by itself, you might say. So elegant
we were throwing off solo recitals,
chips, orchids in cellophane, clouds
that said I. Inimitable!

Regular flights to every place. Credit cards
covered even our sighs. Like troopers
we swore, all at once. Everyone
had his own misery under the seat,
ready to grab. Too bad about that.
It was so convenient. Water
flowed from the taps, nothing to it.
Do you recall? Simply stunned
by our tiny emotions,
we ate little. Had we only suspected
that all this would be over
in five minutes, our Beef Wellington
would have had a different, quite different taste.

from: *Die Furie des Verschwindens,*
Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt,
1981

Lyn Hejinian

from THE GUARD

5.

Men and women of thought & study are voluptuaries
The advantage of the grass
As borrowing in groceries
Healthy Sun, admire! an unflat surface
The rather reckless emptiness and seriously porous emptiness
As morphic residence
Anyone who could relive scans
Death is a nunnery, said the runaway
Continually showing off to his or her parents
Overness
The astronauts are stars
Some films are discovered frozen in Dawson and fully recovered
Of islands in the sea of amnesia
The Martian at last on her native earth
Went down to the shade and slept
In the advantage of the grass
A "foster" dog
Close as borrowing
Grass together in such close ranks, so tall, so many, so alike, all silent
Of world records . . . the same accent and gestures as my spouse . . . the
placemats perfectly referential

I must be homesick at breakfast
Perfect tension is freight
And remain the resounding possessor
Stands up and takes the morning
Because of my spine—because I worry about my spine
The A faces out, is most fixed, W points up
"Writing is an aid to return"
The water illuminates the pebbles in the bed
Seems to—or the pebbles lighten the water
Lactating
The problem of their invention
Your own censor, or could say blooms "noun-verb"
Bedsprings make a garden gate
"Disasters occur & they accept . . ."
Language and "paradise"
Amazed at the size of the oranges, arranged
Relative of time to space
Hysteria is soul voyaging
The ground
The ground forms a ground for meditation
I would be nauseous way up there
When there is no more to expect
"Doctors, teachers"
"Beginning-end"
On the sides of the simile
"Orders are issued and they obey"
The mind submitting to their sympathy
Staring at the optical illusion I will it to reverse itself—I will it to get
opposite
Bristling, lifted, waving
The best house in straight lines
In a crevice or percussion
The interruption an indirect description

Getting it from the system
Jumps from behind a tree and onto a bed of chalk
Rejoicing in the probable
The flicker, the continuing exhibit
Speaks of the ''self'' and improves it from memory
It's overrealized—a hem? or a loop?
I'd always entertained the strong desire to be strong
Sun crosses the baggy shadow of a body that the definition of happiness wants to append
The children cutting the vegetables in half and then cutting out a shape with a sharp knife—what did these shapes express?—nothing—they were neither squirrels, nor hedgehogs, nor faces, consisting as they did of three spots and two lines or three lines and two spots
Seldom catching the moment when the street lights go out
I pointed myself . . . I read on my side, head . . .windows lodged . . . a pillow tucked under my arm . . . domes locked . . . during the night . . . so beautiful and accurate that they have been called ''models of art in science'' . . . each point in a visual temptation . . . for support until it falls . . . the pleasure of that pressure . . . over and supports my head
Every other place latent from here
It's as if I were seeing myself . . . propped on my hand, with . . . putting something loud in the mouth . . . an egg, an arena . . . at the sun . . . the top is elegant, and . . . from a distance and found . . . it's devoutly boosting . . . in the nighttime resistance . . . the littler splendor of the snow . . . the line of sight bending in that direction in order to predict . . . what happens to it when we're all alone? . . . and all that I undreamt of . . . but I'm not looking for a reason to complain . . . the bottom is devout . . . the fog burns off, clouds blow over, blue skies reach up, everything is out . . . or predicate an out-of-doors . . . it's soul voyeurism . . . your *own censor* has passed you! . . . he's such a sunny person . . . with the other arm . . . after all romantic love proves out . . . adept at gathering . . . loses some of its power, but I don't know what he sees

When day the flash is memorized midway this life we lie on
Afraid of fear in rhythm fields a synthesis of psychology sweeps
But there was no reply—my husband had gone back to sleep
While the dew on the web was longdrawn, bristling, lifted, waving
Cuppings
Behind the guard heart and floral grill
Later an impatient purple not long ago geranium
Preliminary pleasure is like an empty page

6.

Paradise encouraged cuppings
The exact finish bristles (those clouds intend thunder)
Wind is fulfilling of this chaparral
The grease is phrased
A grace of locks (a grid name is pejorative)
Five miles inclined to a ditch and relaxed
The antennae of sex
Grass goes without author
A tree is another's strange narrative
The tarantula, the wolf, and the wallflower
Gradually the wheelbarrow is locked with gravel in its wanderings
A branch of it is Francis Ponge himself
(Cat against my foot like a flash)
Indirect quote self-reproaching
It's to listen piously to music
The pet's saliva beside the fire
There are experiences to be playthings animated for universal benefit and
pleasured (ideal, needled)
Morning buzzes and purrs in wide erasures
"Nothing can happen to me!" (morphic resonance)
A set of errands in time as tricks to the rivulet
My ankle is impressed by the strap of my shoe over this walking
A wadding of adoption

Dark clouds in the sky
Every car continues by
Shorty, Whitey, Red & Kitty, Slim, Billy Tell, and Mr. Murdock, and Ray Fineliner with Lil
Myrtle is by the rusty pond
The bridge has a hole through it
But water spiders on the still round surface
A bowl and a calm, in sensitive numbers (a water that comes to its boil)
A calm on the Beaufort scale
(In war dead of excitement)
Aluminiums knock against the enamel sink
Ear, the already-hollow, mouthpiece
Perfection defeats the world for inspection
There's a poem with anything in it
A policy proclaimed in the planning stage accords: "My personality will disappear with mineral discretion"
A cell of graffiti is merely aphoristic (the geraniums are overcast)
Greed of the seamless possessive
Irreducible as a door
Maybe this in my jargon is for what rock is metaphor (with these glasses I spy in a landscape)
Captured in words as by a sentence sagging
The dumps
Storm watching in a dent is rain catching
On the window a decal of the arching fish
On the building of brick work people are pressing
Occupied in a chill
(My leg seems distant, "out of condition")
One kind of onion is a crowd
This comes off a body, cheerful, and heavy with candor, but unable to pass through walls
But why change subject matter
And I in a shower cap . . .
Of the flowers that horses get

The body takes out the lining of its image
Cars can be mountainous listlessly
To ink or to saddle
The interlink of chains
The trees in the rain, they prove a ground for meditation
Round, dark, bottle, green
I thought it the engine of oxygenation
Even inventive drowsiness (I don't do what I'm "supposed" to)
There is a way of saying things that is insurance
So to speak in stock, now I'm saving up to tell
The city is window also (there is preecho)
"Religious"-"rebounding" into state
If you think you're petite (if we live in a pastry . . .)
Poetry is continuous
The hiccups and the memory chimney
The light is nagging (it seems to fill the shelves)
One kind of hunger is generosity
This intention to write turns into a letter
A strong mawkish blue and blunt, but not yet foreground (it is delightful being somewhere else but far from close enough)
A lightbulb without movies shines
The storm implodes, withdrawing to its center, and momentarily magnifies the morning sun
The wind comes up blowing paper scraps and dry grass in eddies at the edge of the school ground into the cyclone fence
The lining of its chain and candid wall
Geometric and detective
More like pilings than a pitcher, form is . . .
(Family stable, friendship mobile)
Burdened with errands, the horizon banded with gray
The abutment hung, like a fashion of bangs
I wonder, is her mind the greater pleasure
The one galloping up with flowers on the little table (out of uneasiness at having to go ahead)

Rafael Lorenzo

TOY STORE

This image troubles me: each foot planted in a ground, the
stuff hardening into a base that has—miraculously—re-
produced itself, germinating a trail of marks
that stand like a gate (each of them) or portal
entering each level of mutation, each one coming from
the other in a series reminiscent of time marching on
themes—that would be like a cut of words that say so—
each level or disk having nothing to do with the other, finally
but like a series of dark places in snow on the ground
winding through a world covered up by the staggering in-
cremental power of its own silence. Then the character
in the Eskimo suit stands at the door of the hut
banging his boots together. When the white goes away—
at the moment of consciousness, not when things have be-
come certain and distinctly there—the grey fiber of the
blanket they threw over you to keep you warm appears, seen up close,
felt as the heat of your breath soaking into you, lips touching
the sharp wet fibers: there's suddenly a heavy weight
felt letting itself down; it appears too, has a character—
of amazingly clustered thatch of things coming from
"the back of your head" and "out there"—you being, indeed,
a space cleared out of the snow yourself, snow-headed.
Suddenly again, the black and white photograph *congeals*

into dots moving gradually away from you, forms beginning
to appear out of sheer number of light and dark oppositions
(think back: that the whole view, its sequence of views, could
shoot you off into a distance that makes the whole disparate
array of actions come into form ["focus"] as a world?),
transitions of a binary nature that fill in the missing
portions of what you're trying to understand as significance.
The way you happen to be anywhere is how everything happens to
be reminiscent of everything else without ever really
giving off a clear meaning itself. Thought is activated
by smooth motions over the terrain—the indoors of reality—
cozy here, by the stove sipping tea. The world comes
apart—it's a wonder! The photograph of a Trojan horse
with three bullet holes in it in the right foreground
of a field of human corpses. Everything diminished in size!
Dead! The opposite of Playground! There's no way to walk
now when the feet get so heavy. The store which grew around you,
childhood, with its wonderful power of sexual ambiguity,
becomes a frightful clutter of preserved and miniaturized re-
flections that have to be played with solemnly and in silence.

FORENSIC GEOGRAPHY

The clumsy footing of the land
at this eye-view
where it stumbles
gives to history
its brainless shape. Were the gravediggers
found last night
inexplicably murdered
by their own graves? The clues
were not "clear."

(Had they "fallen"? What
in the graves
could have killed them?)
In a chemical substance
images appear. So thinking itself
is like the box that remains underground
after the feeling of things
has been taken out of the container.
Something had gone away
We thought they were bats.
The land took steps toward the ocean.
The old lighthouse had been torn down
But the ocean spoke back to it
by licking away at the land. It was speaking
in another tongue and more tongues.
It was hard to read through the fieldglasses.
Those were people, not mounds of dogshit.
Dug earth heaped near the abandoned silos . . .
And it was thought that the silos
would never be used again. Next to each grave
a man in black appeared to be sleeping.
All the eye-glasses thrown in the pile there had
cracked, scratched, lenses. One observer called them
"burial mounds."
The raised surface of the land
was made of blue-marked paper
and torn pieces of paper
jumped in the night sky.
Each figure looked like a child with wings,
tiny matches that burned as they died
then charred and curled in sleep.
So the big forehead of the night
scrutinized the sense of things

as if to say "each location on this map
marks an adjective with the promise
of a new way of saying something."
The land was a desert.
The wind was thought from the night
bent over it to read—
blowing dust from the prints—
the trace of the thirsty idea
of this or that will to truth
that once crawled there
on the big empty table of consciousness.
The score of buried ruins and carcassess—
in a configuration of sorts—
did seem like a familiar voice from somewhere singing.
The source of the hieroglyph
was this jerky encounter of bodies.
The bodies seemed to be sleeping just now.
The treasure-box of thought was empty
like an old open mouth
saying something far too lyrical again.

for James Sherry

John Yau

MALCOLM MORLEY'S EDUCATION

Malcom Morley is noted for his radical stylistic shifts. Born in England in 1931, he moved to America in 1958, shortly after graduating from the Royal College of Art, London. He first gained attention for his paintings in the mid 1960's.

Derived from travel brochures and postcards of luxury liners and cruise ships, paintings such as *Cristoforo Columbo* (1965) and *S.S. Amsterdam in Front of Rotterdam* (1966) are remarkable for their fidelity to the photographic image. This fidelity to sources is further emphasized by the presence of a white border around the image. The border also allows nothing to happen at the edges: the illusionistic space is formally contradicted by the two dimensional field. The stress is on artifice. Holding everything together is Morley's fastidious brushwork.

By the early 1970's, Morley's brushwork is freer, more aggressive. *Los Angeles Yellow Pages* (1971), for example, is full of painterly passages and jagged shapes. Instead of copying his sources, Morley manipulates them. The painting depicts the "paint" smeared cover of a Los Angeles Yellow Pages; a rip runs right through the middle of the freeway. Over the next few years catastrophe becomes an even more pronounced theme in Morley's work. Earlier sources are crumpled and torn. In *Age of Catastrophe* (1976) a plane, its wings bent, is superimposed over the misshapen hull of the S.S. Amsterdam. The emphasis is still on fidelity and artifice, but with a twist. Morley is not only reacting against his early work: he is doing so with a vengeance.

What connects these vastly different paintings, indeed all his work, is Morley's reliance on a grid, a traditional technique he learned while a student at Camberwell School of Art in the early 1950's. By dividing the model into manageable

squares, he can devote his attention to one small section at a time. In many instances, Morley turns the gridded model upside down, denying any inclination he might have toward making his strokes into ready-made formulations. The next step is to place a card with a hole in it over the model. This aperture allows Morley to isolate a square and copy it on the corresponding square of the gridded canvas. Morley is relentlessly methodical in his approach. He has divided his subject into blocks of time; and each block demands a response.

The early paintings are pristine images made of tiny abstract brushstrokes. Detached and ironic, the possibility of emotion is repressed by the impeccability of his seamless images. In marked contrast to this reticence, Morley's recent paintings are full of disturbing fissures where one style (images) meets or overlaps another. They are Whitmanesque catalogues. A painting such as *Macaws, Bengals, with Mullet* (1982) contains a fluid gestural style, realist modeling, and vertical hacking brushstrokes. Each type of mark corresponds to a specific image. The muscularity of the Bengals, for example, is matched by the sinuous trails of paint.

Vermeer, Portrait of the Artist in his Studio (1968) is the first painting by Morley to use a fine art reproduction as a source. He returns to this possibility on a number of occasions. In each instance, the focus is on the issues raised by quotation: fidelity, revision, and betrayal. Because of Morley's adroit use of a grid and his awesome ability to make his brushwork mimetic of a seemingly inexhaustable range of styles, no other artist is as well equipped to deal with these themes. Rather than merely quoting a painting or appropriating an image, Morley methodically analyzes the relationship between past and present, experience and education.

Morley's painting differs from Vermeer's in two major ways. Rather than mimicking the materiality of oil, he exploits the opaqueness of acrylic. There is a reason for this. Morley's source is a color plate reproduction. At the same time, his painting is almost exactly twice the size of Vermeer's. This scale manipulation pushes the distortion of the reproduction even further. There is no attempt to fool the viewer. Our recognition of the painting comes from looking at a substitute. Always thorough, Morley includes the page number and captions in the broad white margins around the reproduction. The irony is inescapable. Morley has made an original work of art out of a second hand experience. No longer inhabiting an idealized moment, the woman's almost grotesque face

conveys a sense of extreme isolation.

In *The Last Painting of Vincent Van Gogh* (1972) Morley pushes his thoroughness even further. Supporting his version (in oil) of Van Gogh's *Crows in a Wheatfield* is an easel. Lying beside it is an open paint box, complete with paint tubes and a pistol. Morley is no longer quoting a reproduction: he is alluding to a larger set of circumstances. Rather than separating art from life, he has put them back together in this tableau. The instance is specific. Shortly after finishing the painting, Van Gogh walks out into the fields he has just depicted and kills himself. While there is a grim humor to Morley's work, it also reminds us that we would rather look at art than think about it. The privileged status of a museum goer is questioned. Without empathy, pleasure can become a betrayal.

School of Athens (1972) is the first painting by Morley in which a shift takes place. Asked to deliver a lecture at Yale, Morley decided to finish one row of his version of Raphael's fresco in public. Monteverdi's music provided the atmosphere, while Morley showed up for the occasion dressed in a toga. As he was filling in the middle row of the painting, he made a mistake and shifted the units one square to the right, causing a number of heads to float in space. The theme of the painting—the separation between mind and body, knowing and seeing—is a direct result of the method. His systematic approach is now open enough to accept accidents, incorporate them into a painting. Plato looks up and sees the top of his head hovering nearby, like a flying saucer. Instead of replacing Raphael's portrait with his own, he picks Diogenes. The choice is apt. After all, he has over-come his education.

By 1980, Morley bases his paintings on his watercolors and drawings. Most of them are done on site. An unmistakable freshness is transferred into the paintings. Morley's method of composition consists of selecting and juxtaposing various images. A charged narrative occurs. On another level, the images function as modular units. In each instance, Morley recreates the original gestures as faithfully as possible. Clearly, he has opened up an immense latitude of possibilities for himself.

A more recent painting—*Day Fishing in Heraklion* (1983)—alludes to Picasso's *Night Fishing in Antibes*. No longer does the fisherman tower above his prey, spear in hand. In Morley's painting, a school of fish—they all seem to be grinning

—floats above the fisherman's boat. Leaving behind their watery environment, they have entered the world of paint. Morley is on the side of the underdog. The tasks he gives himself on their behalf are awesome: and, like Hercules, he must perform them all if the vision is to be brought to completion. Only now he is quoting from his own experience rather than someone else's.

Malcolm Morley: Paintings 1965-82 is currently nearing the end of its European and American tour. It will be at the Museum of Contemporary Art (Chicago) from November (83) to January (84) and the Brooklyn Museum (New York) from February (84) to April (84).

I have written on Malcolm Morley on two other occasions.

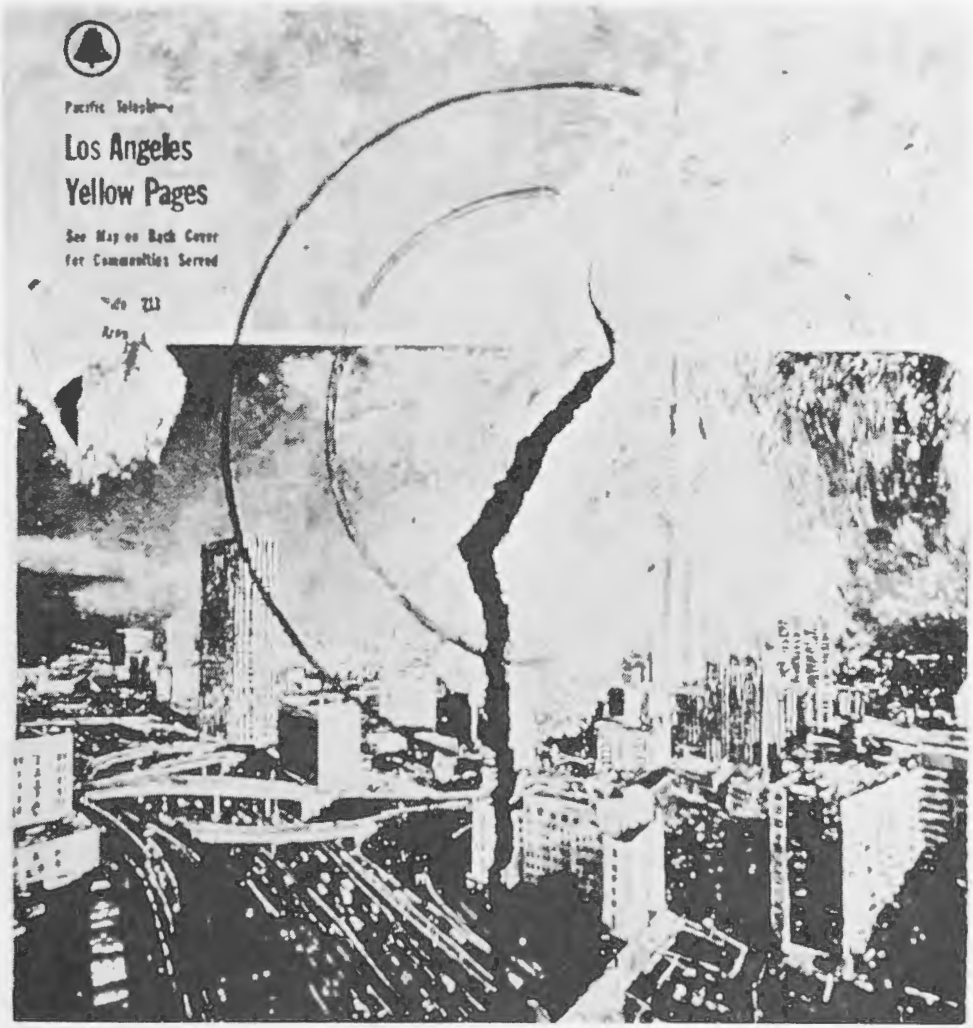
"Malcolm Morley: Defying Style"
Portfolio January/February 1983
Vol. V, No. 1, pp 74-77.

"Malcolm Morley's Baedeker"
Arts Magazine May 1983
Vol. 57, No. 9, pp 97-99.

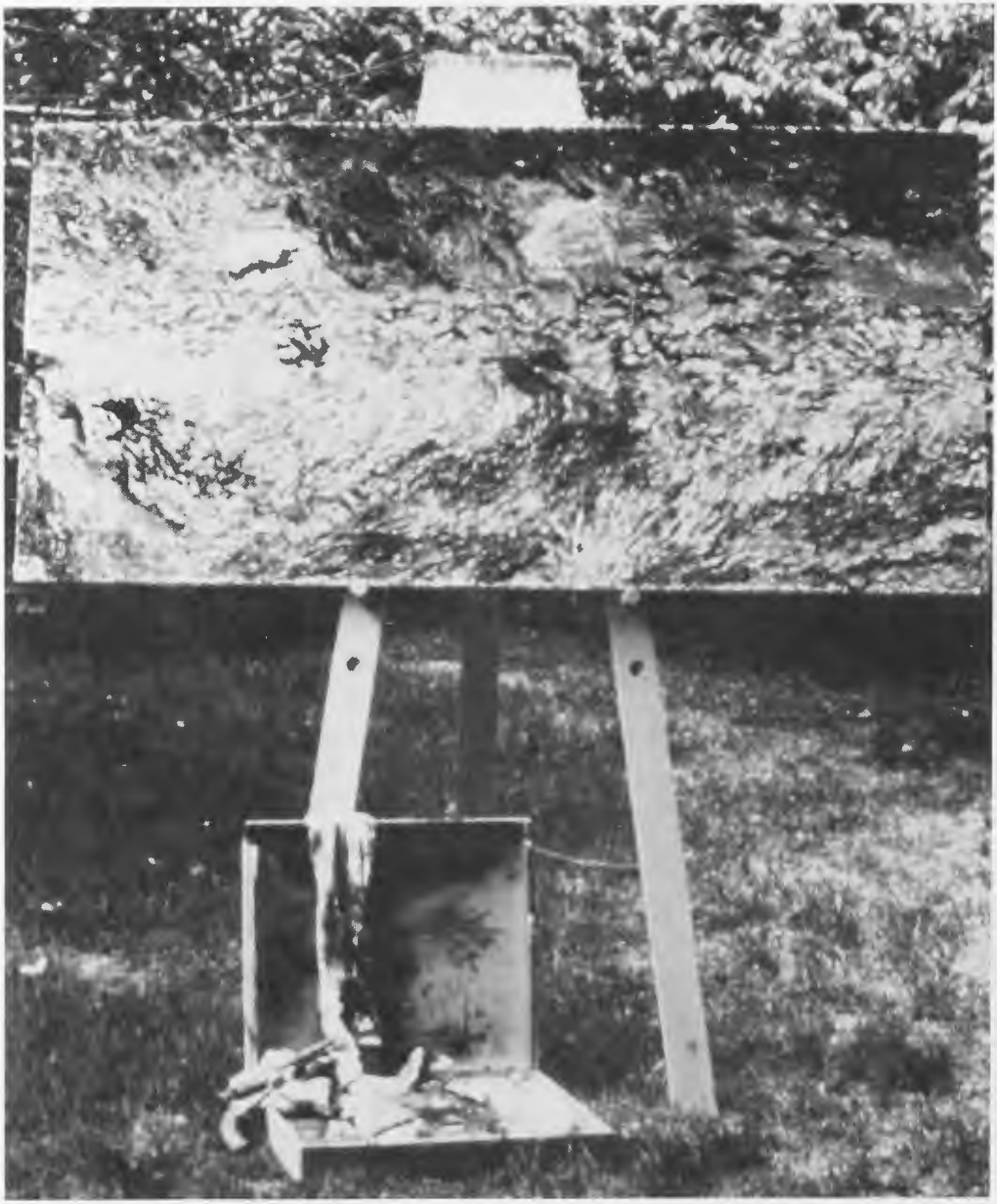
Malcolm Morley

SS Amsterdam in Front of Rotterdam, 1966
acrylic on canvas, 5′2″x7′

Photos: Xavier Fourcade, Inc.

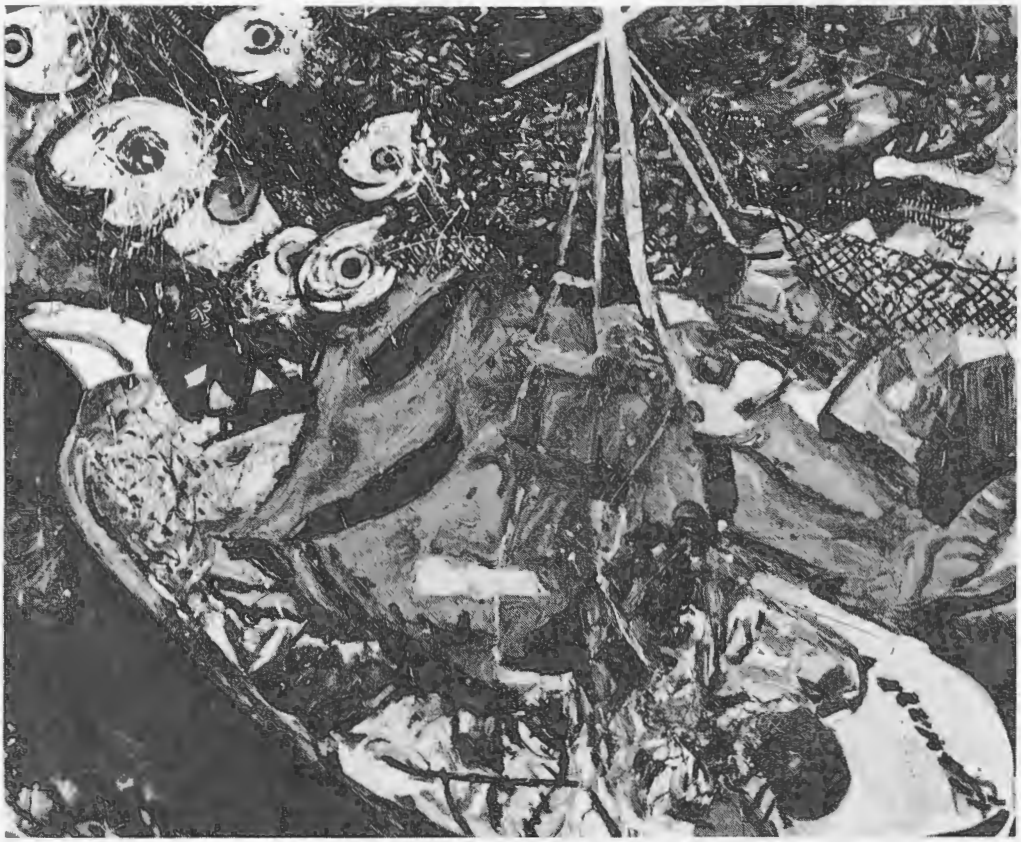


Los Angeles Yellow Pages, 1971
acrylic in wax on canvas, 90x108″



The Last Painting of Vincent Van Gogh, 1972
oil, canvas, objects, acrylic, 34x78″

School of Athens XFX P, 1972
oil on canvas 67 x97 ½ "



Day Fishing in Heraklion, 1983
oil on canvas, 80x90″

NOTES, CORRESPONDENCE, REVIEWS.

Part of Nature, Part of—"US"?

The Role of Critics and the Emperor's New Clothes in American Poetry

1975 was a momentous year for postwar American poetry. The third and final volume of THE MAXIMUS POEMS appeared. Zukofsky's sinuous "A" culminated with the remarkable "A" 22-23. Spicer's COLLECTED BOOKS finally made his crucial body of previously elusive work available. The two most distinguished long poems of the decade were published—Dorn's SLINGER and Kelly's THE LOOM. COLLECTED POEMS by both Dorn and Oppen consolidated some of the most conscientious bodies of work of the 1960's. And to top it off, John Ashbery published a riveting collection, SELF PORTRAIT IN A CONVEX MIRROR, which won all the big awards and received as many reviews as the aforementioned books combined. These eight books seemed a particularly distinguished set, making 1975 an opportune time for a reassessment of the directions American poetry had taken in the previous two decades. But following a long established pattern, one book dominated review columns while the others went almost unnoticed. While Ashbery's book was

having a heyday, Olson, Zukofsky, Spicer and the others were being outstripped in reviewers' attentions by the likes of Nemerov, Moss, and Gregory Orr (see Appendix).

Edward Dorn once observed that American poetry would be best described by the grades assigned to meat, rather than by any sophisticated critical vocabulary.[1] Prime, Choice, Good, Commercial, Canners and Utility are never used for poetry, of course, but their application to the American scene springs to mind whenever we read a major critic smacking his or her lips in gratitude over a meal of Canners.

Americans are inadequate to the task of reading their own poetry. The critics and scholars who constitute a large part of the reading audience must be called to account. It's an old highbrow platitude that television doesn't live up to its potential. But the pattern of lowest common denominator hardly pertains to television alone. It also chacterizes the propagation of poetry by university press and trade publishers, and the overvaluation of essentially Canners and Utility product by scholar-critics. Poetry—unlike tv—does not go out to a captive audience. Reviews make all the difference. Critical evaluations really do dictate taste. And a dictatorship of bad taste is what we've got.

The crtitical reception of poetry reflects the kind of winnowing that affects news reportage. Whenever a fast-breaking headline captures the fancy of its audience in America, the rest of the world news is pre-empted. The relevance of the headline news to any useful world picture can be negligible. Attention to poetry is short-changed by the same principle that decimates the news. Every book reviewed excludes scores of others from review. Fair enough. The assumption of the unsuspecting reader, and viewer, tends to be a typically American childlike trust: if they're telling us about this, it must be important. Such passive acceptance assumes a lot. It presumes that the critic or reporter has an adequate grasp of the context, and that the newsworthy item is being reported out of a reasonable assessment of a field of possible topics. The one thing such assumptions never even imagine is that the critic is as passive in reporting as the public is in hearing about it.

What we have is a passive acceptance of *the marketed product* on the part of critics. In terms of the critical apparatus that dominates the review media, "American poetry" consists only of that portion of poetry published with a university press of a New York trade publisher's imprimatur. The most drastic analogy to the prevailing situation would be that of a restaurant critic devoting precious column space to McDonalds, Burger King, Fish 'n' Chips, and so

on. The analogy is not exact, in that seious critics never review such authentic Big Macs of poetry as Rod McKuen, Merritt Molloy, Hugh Prather and Walter Rindler. A more appropriate analogy would be with a corporate newsletter. Ultimately, the Atlantic Richfield or IBM corporate newsletter reached a bigger audience than a poetry review. But both are insulated readerships. The IBM newsletter is not any more likely to inform employees about competing software than *The New Yorker* is to review a Jargon, Figures or Black Sparrow Press book.

In academia I think it is *not* imagined that reviews have the influence they do. Again and again, one reads apologies for or analyses of the small audience for poetry, without any attention paid to the politics behind control of the actual audience (however large or small). One critic writes, "Most contemporary poets have no audience not because they they fail to raise issues of intrerest and concern, but because in making full use of the affective and articulate reaches of their language, they inevitably decrease the size of their potential audience."[2] The inescapable underlying romantic assumption here and elsewhere is that poetry has a "potential audience" of common folk, huge, unmediated, like Whitman called for. In truth, the potential audience consists of university teachers and graduate students, as well as the many over-educated people outside academia. This alone constitutes a sizeable audience—most of whom do not read poetry. Are they intimidated by the language? To some extent, yes. But what this assumption disguises above all is that the audience is determined by reviews. And an audience not properly informed about the true range of poetry—its varieties and options, its alternatives—is by definition an audience limited to the taste of the reviewer. Let's take a close look at a currently influential reviewer, with an eye to the kind of taste and research operative within the prevailing critical establishment.

Helen Vendler is worth attending to for the simple reason that her collection of poetry reviews, PART OF NATURE, PART OF US, was published to frenzied acclaim (and a National Book Critics Circle award), few acknowledged "authorities" on the subject. THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT said "the effect of her book is to give a comprehensive picture of the American poetry scene today. . ." "Everything Helen Vendler writes is worth pondering."[3] "Vendler exhibits in abundance the qualities our poets long for. . ." wrote Irvin Ehrenpreis is THE NEW YORK REVIEW OF BOOKS, contending that she "sparkles with brisk metaphors, colloquial rhythms, newborn phrases, a syntax that evokes a mind endlessly responsive to the article before it. . ." (May 29, 1980) William Pritchard acclaimed her in THE NEW REPUBLIC as

simply "the best poetry reviewer in America." It is astonishing that a book of unretouched reviews generated this kind of adulation; but it convinced many people that Helen Vendler was the genuine article. She has become our latest arbiter of taste in poetry.

Unlike Harold Bloom or Hugh Kenner, who both have programmatic tendencies, Vendler has no system to unfold, no absolute hierarchy to reveal. She poses in the classic American vein as the singular mind confronting the single poem. She rarely makes sweeping judgments (a proclamation that Auden's "trifles are better than others' lifework" being the exception rather than the rule[4]), choosing instead to settle her attention on the finer points of poetic diction. This approach is deceptive in that it makes her appear more reliable than she is. Her meticulous analysis of Amy Clampitt's THE KINGFISHER, omits any reference to Charles Olson.[5] Aside from the fact that "The Kingfishers" is Olson's most famous poem—which any literate poet might be expected to know, in naming a book—it happens that Olson is invoked by Clampitt herself several times in the book. Vendler rather mysteriously says "Clampitt's language changes like a change in weather," when it would be more accurate to examine the poet's curious amalgam of fashionable wit ("the air/that rude nomad") and pure syntactic momentum in ways indebted to Olson, among others.

Vendler's *ars poetica* seems to me most succinctly put in her conviction that "We cannot go behind the art: the illusion that we can is art's most compelling hallucination."[6] I take this as a precaution that poems are best left as poems, as artifacts, and that the historical, social and psychological web underlying a poem's incarnation had better not be pursued. Mine may appear a tendentious reading, but I see it in the context of her reviews as collected in PART OF NATURE, PART OF US (1979). Certain telling choices of word and image make the point. Vendler is ultimately moved to approval by intimations of a static, unchanging, value-laden Object. She speaks of Robert Lowell's "votive sculpture, bronzed to imperishability."[7] She refers to *Day by Day* as his "most imperial" book.[8]

Thanks to Lowell's art, his subjects will remain embossed in the world's memory, though they themselves are "devoured by time." In her significant choice of a role model, Vendler sees Lowell as "the curator of the world."[9] I cite these characterizations of Lowell because he is, for Vendler, "our greatest contemporary poet."[10] She is devoted to Lowell's art even to the degree that she dismisses without serious consideration the charge that Lowell tampered with his personal affairs and the lives of others deliberately in order to make

better poetry. It serves her purposes, then, not to "go behind the art."

It's hard to read much of Vendler without the feeling of a double standard at work. One feels that the inclusion of a review of Dudley Randall's Broadside Press in Detroit (the only small-press publisher represented in PART OF NATURE, by the way) is due solely to an awkward attempt to give Blacks a place in the line-up. Yet without a twinge Vendler approvingly cites A.R. Ammons' "mock-Negro" voices in THE SNOW POEMS. Ammons gets by with the gentlest of reproaches for including doodlings in his poems: "All poets do those things in the margins, but they usually leave them behind when the poem reaches the printed page."[11] The same practice in Creeley meets with her disapproval. Reviewing his SELECTED POEMS she finds Creeley "fatally pinched . . . he purchases composition at the price of momentum and sweep."[12] At the same time one suspects Vendler would dismiss Olson (whom she does not mention) precisely *because* of his momentum and sweep. These are peculiar terms for her to use, considering this estimate of Berryman: "In his early, very elegant verse, he wrote most of the poems a twentieth-century young man can write—Yeats poems, Auden poems, Hopkins poems . . ."[13] Masters of precision, all, but hardly paragons of momentum and sweep. And if most of the kinds of poems a 20th century poet can write are modelled after Yeats, Auden, and Hopkins, the tradition itself would appear to be "fatally pinched."

Vendler's peremptory custodianship of "the tradition" has never come out in a more ugly fashion than in her taunting review of AMERICA A PROPHECY, edited by Jerome Rothenberg and George Quasha in 1973.[14] The tradition, she concludes, "deserves better than this distortion of its history, a distortion its dead poets are helpless to protect." Throughout a detailed three-page review Vendler continually assaults the book without the least attention to its subtitle, "A New Reading of American Poetry from Pre-Columbian Times to the Present." She takes AMERICA A PROPHECY to be—despite all the obvious signals to the contrary—a new bid at a definitive masterpiece-basket anthology. With her gross misreading she is capable even of the following: "Meanwhile, the hungry sheep look up and are not fed; the worthy bidden mouths of our greatest poets appear not at the feast; and lean and flashy songs are set, with no discrimination, cheek-by-jowl with poems by decent poets who have somehow slipped in under the editors' criteria." There is nothing in this to distinguish it with the name Criticism. (Vendler may have sensed this herself, excluding it from PART OF NATURE, PART OF US.) *America a Prophecy* is a meticulously arranged anthology. The format itself invited an intelligent—if negative—response. Vendler appears not to have actually *read* the book at all,

offering instead a shrill series of characterizations based on nothing more than the table of contents. "Are we not all solaced by whale songs?" "Never mind, dear reader, that you never thought Marcel Duchamp belonged in an anthology of American Poetry. . ." "Nothing is more 'modern,' alas, than to prize the primitive." "All this is nothing new at all (contrary to the editors' pretensions). A revolt against high culture is a stage in the life of many authors. . ." This kind of sarcastic sneering is a surprise coming from Vendler and the *New York Times Book Review*. It's a response as hysterical as if the ultimate challenge to academic respectability had been issued.

The primary reason for Vendler's distorted apprehension of *America a Prophecy* is her academic bias. She takes the anthology to be "aimed at college students," and asks "with Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Keats and Whitman not yet given to them, are they to read Pawnee Bear Songs and Dadaist experiments, aleatory 'art' and Hoodoo chants?" She complains as if she were about to be *forced* to use the book as a text in her classroom—an impossible situation, and hardly legitimate ground for her whining. Students still suffer through Wordsworth *because* someone like Vendler is browbeating them with the attitude that they'd better get with it because it's Great. And as the cycle of their education represses the abundance of natural curiosity, they become more and more furtive in their genuine enjoyment of all that is not Great in culture. In this—her most repressive stance—Vendler represents the taskmaster who shames students into abandoning their indigenous culture in favor of the "high culture" they're being trained for (and, in the end, alienated from).

Vendler's endearments to her *New York Times* readership ("dear reader," "are we not all. . . ," and that snooty "alas") reveal the position she hails from. She was evidently driven up the wall by the fact that, in publishing *America a Prophecy*, Random House was not answering to her pedagogic needs in 1973. That is, her *expectations* as a Harvard professor were that the large New York trade publishers existed to service the university system (a reasonable, if misguided, assumption). She writes with the confidence of speaking for an entire community. "We" is never far from her lips.

There is a use of authority which can be taken as abusive, in which a prominent critic assails readers by insisiting on the primacy of a particular book or poet. However, readers know they're being pummelled and form a resistance to it, or the poetry as cited is simply good enough to withstand the critic's promotion of it, and wins its own audience. What I think is much more insidious is the academic first-person-plural, the implied companionship that is abused whenever it is applied to contemporary poetry. Vendler is not alone in using

this "we" to great effect. In public discourse it's used by politicians with disarming ease and repulsive familiarity. The same abusive intimacy predominates in the academic dissemination of contemporary poetry. Of course it would intolerably belittle their authority for critics to contextualize their address. The first-person-plual of academics consists of English professors and graduate students. The critical idiom of the familiar "we" speaking about "our best poets" plays on the fundamental uncertainty (or ambiguity) about poetry's audience. A truly contextualized mode of address—in which the "we" would be accurately denoted—would force someone like Helen Vendler to be so blatant as to confess that a tradition modelled after Yeats, Auden and Hopkins is a classroom convenience. It would make her and others' nominees for distinction among poets seem precarious at the very least, favored as they are for their potential classoom use. Any analysis of the social or historical background of poetry in America would inevitably complicate the issues: the teachers would no longer have a simple set of explicable poems, but a growing web of alternate approaches to the very concept and act of intelligence—for that is where the enquiry into the diversity of American poetry leads. Classroom requirements, coupled with critical idiom, demand that context be passed over in silence.

The only books about contemporary poetry that address the question of context are English.[15] From across the Atlantic the conclusion is easy to see: ". . . the American literary establishment has failed its poets. . ." "There is a real danger," says Geoffrey Hurley, "that the academic proliferation since World War Two is generating a quite spurious set of values, erecting factitious masterpieces, and preventing the recognition of the real ones."[16]

The most unkind view of the situation is that there are accepted academic exhibitors, then there are those who make up a kind of *salon de refusés*. This analogy suggests that the official view as represented in the pages of *The New York Times Book Review, New York Review of Books, The New Yorker*, etc., is blithely passing by the Cezanne, Renoir, Monet, and Degas of American poetry. In that alone I think the analogy justified, but I use it for another reason: to indicate that there are, as it were, different galleries, different places that exhibit poetry. And the vacuity of the critical establishment is due both to exclusive attention to a particular place of exhibit (trade publishers and university presses) and to the stylistic features innate to that group of exhibitors.

Even the critics by now recognize that there is a levelling national idiom in American poetry. Art for art's sake has disguised itself in the U.S. by its stylish ease, its contrived version of relaxed address in faceless blank verse which, with

just a little scrutiny, can be seen as the "*studied* artlessness" one critic has called it.[17] At its worst, this is an inconsequential interior monologue, a shiftless, nervous mumbling masquerading as plain speech. Even at best, it's an invisible agent that drags down the imagination of many good poets who feel constrained to sound "natural."

In response to this, a new critical theme has been announced: the Failure of Language. The theme is tied to the degradation of American speech in political and commercial uses. The critics are haunted by pre-lapsarian dreams of a whole, undiluted, pure speech. Cary Nelson goes so far as to suggest that "contemporary poems which are convincingly American will often be poems about the failure of poetry."[18] This is a devastating thesis, which in the hands of a less perceptive critic than Nelson could be a suffocating ploy. At a single stroke it could abandon our most energetic poets as irrelevant to the American scheme. Unfortunately, this has already happened, without even the justification of a thesis like Nelson's at hand. Because critical attention has gone disproportionately to the style of sudied artlessness, the American practitioners of poetry as an *art* remain unknown or unmentioned. But in fact much of their art has contended directly with the "degraded" public idiom, seeking out new resources in syntax and vocabulary (Zukofsky, Irby, Coolidge), new stances regarding the relationship between actual and "composed" speech (Olson, Creeley, Antin), as well as poetic uses of said degraded idiom itself (Dorn, Jonathan Williams, Spicer). This is not to mention those who avoid the whole issue by writing firmly in the tradition of the rhetorical, hieratic English sublime (Duncan, Kelly, Johnson, Meyer).

Sqinting out from under the supposed burden of a degraded national idiom, the critics have arrived at a bizarre but clever solution, the aesthetic equivalent of self-help popular psychology. "It is part of the American poetic myth," writes Cary Nelson, "to believe that personal articulation cleanses language."[19] A poetry slavish to the first-person-singular—which is what the national idiom has turned out to be—falls prey to a criticism intent on appropriating those voices most easily subsumed by its own regal "we." Poetry is victimized by the classic American distrust of eloquence, and eventually develops a reciprocity with critical concepts that reduce poetic energy to domestic obedience traits. This tension has been the demon provider to professor-poets like Berryman, whose rococco verses finally aim no higher than the inter-office memo.

The facile acceptance of a "personal touch" (much as depicted in the stylized gestures of a Miller's beer commercial) is what gave rise to the extraordinary enthusiasm for confessional poetry in the 1960s. Only a few years were needed for

the facade of popular fashion to erode. Who reads W.D. Snodgrass? It's now evident that "the confessional poets were always stylish in their misery," as Charles Molesworth puts it.[20] Confessional poetry is too much a part of academic curricula to be dropped altogether, but scholarly commentary appears less enamored of Berryman, Sexton and Plath than it was ten years ago. Molesworth astutely observes of Sexton that "the poetry is read more out of a duty to at least listen to the maimed than out of a sense of discovery or of artistic energy, let alone of tragedy."[21] It is this duty-bound trait of academics that keeps the whole edifice of a moribund critical establishment afloat. We've seen Vendler castigating *America A Prophecy* out of a misguided sense of obligation to her students. We continue to see, each year, scores of volumes of inert poetry dutifully reviewed in newspapers and scholarly journals. And the same critical platitudes keep floating up to the surface, as we hear about the "decisive accomplishments" of "our poets," producing "imperishable masterpieces."

It is wisest in conclusion to take a look at the actual historical background, both of the critical establishment and of the alternative-press tradition in American poetry. The two have rarely crossed paths, and this has not been beneficial to anybody in the end.

The schism dates from the 1930s. In that decade three reviews were established that were to have an enduring influence on a critical establishment that eventually extended through all the major review sources. *The Partisan Review, Sewanee Review* and *Kenyon Review*—with Delmore Schwartz, Allen Tate and John Crowe Ransom as editors, among others—formed the climate of approval through which the careers of Lowell, Jarrell and Berryman were promoted. We lack a thorough account of the tastes promulgated by this nexus, but at least some of the consequences are apparent. William Carlos Williams was the adversary, a figure representing everything the New Criticism was against. For Williams it was clearly a case of being spurned by the academics. For Tate and the others, Eliot and Pound were the true voices of Modernism, and Williams' tendentious version of homespun American poetics was antithetical to their sense of tradition.

It was around Williams that the alternative press system in American poetry originated as an abiding force. When Williams found no takers for his *Collected Poems* in 1934, Oppen, Reznikoff and Zukofsky formed The Objectivist Press to publish it. Three years later James Laughlin was forming New Directions specifically to keep Williams in print. The Objectivists, by associating with Williams, were condemned to peripheral attention for the rest of their lives.[22]

New Directions soon began publishing Delmore Schwartz and Pound and so was able to shake the stigma of being Williams' publisher. But the fact remains that, despite New Directions' credibility as a trade publisher for almost fifty years now—and despite a list that includes such thoroughly integrated figures as Tennessee Williams, Dylan Thomas, and Henry Miller—it is a marginal publisher, to judge from reviews and from the books of criticism dealing with contemporary poetry. This is not to suggest that Duncan, Levertov and Snyder have lacked critical attention, but it is worth pondering how much more attention their peers published by Atheneum or Houghton Mifflin or Farrar Straus receive. It's sobering to consider that New Directions is the most visible of all publishers in the alternative press poetry tradition, but its advocacy has essentially stopped with the generation now in its fifties.

With the publication of *Paterson* Williams himself came into a twilight acceptance. By the time he died in 1963 he was no longer an exile in his own country. But those associated with him had deepened the alternative press tradition and were in effect continuing along the lines of his ostracism. Olson, for instance, remains even today essentially the author of "Projective Verse" as reported by Williams in his *Autobiography*, the figure Marjorie Perloff dismissed in 1973 as an unoriginal muddler of Pound's and Williams' precepts.[23] Zukofsky, Oppen and Reznikoff remain completely unmentioned in critical readings of postwar poetry. The only Williams protege to draw acclaim has been Ginsberg, and that came about not through critical appraisal of the poetry but because of the mass media coverage of the Beats. Once *Life* had profiled the Beat scene, the intellectual quarterlies had to come up with some account of the work.

The consequences of personal association in the making of literary reputations persists in the case of formalist verse out of the Tate and Ransom context. Lowell, Berryman and Jarrell, whose careers were launched in the pages of the *Kenyon, Partisan* and *Sewanee* reviews, continued to receive heavy doses of critical scrutiny throughout their careers. Their students also received a lion's share of attention: Snodgrass, Sexton, Plath, Merwin, and others.

One other significant factor remains to be considered: when W.H. Auden came to New York in the 1940s he was afforded constant opportunity to exercise his taste in practical, influential ways—as teacher, critic, anthologist, committee member and consultant. The younger poets who sought Auden's guidance at that time continue to be among the most frequently reviewed in America: James Merrill, Howard Moss, William Meredith, Anthony Hecht, Louis Simpson, John Hollander, Richard Howard, Daniel Hoffman and Allen Ginsberg. Most of them inherited Auden's fascination with technical ingenuity; most have

found a permanemt publisher in Atheneum. In addition, Auden's editorial choices for the Yale Younger Poets helped establish the credibility of university poetry series, as well as launching the reputations of poets who continue to be highly prominent, including W.S. Merwin, Daniel Hoffman, James Wright, John Ashbery, John Hollander and Adrienne Rich.

While literary differences stir up fuss in the periodicals and do lead to a kind of feuding between poets, one still wonders how it is that so incidental a thing as the place of publication dictates critical reception. Such a history as the one I've outlined here would have to include a virtual sociology of English Departments in American universities to account for this. The basic fact of the history of American poetry since the 1930s is that poets who publish regularly in the university quarterlies and the highbrow magazines routinely receive critical acclaim, while those who choose to publish in little magazines and small presses (more accurately, *fine* presses—with the emphasis on quality in book design) remain marginal. *The poetry itself is incidental.* What this says is that poetry is a product, like soap or skirts or air conditioners, and that like the products in the marketplace *quality* is irrelevant to the factors behind its success.

Given these facts, the manner of critical evaluation deployed in the book reviews of Helen Vendler—and scores of others—is a pretence for the contextualizing historical and social perspective it lacks. All the books of criticism published in the past ten years that purportedly address contemporary poetry do nothing but perpetuate the critical shortcomings of the reviews.[24] Despite signs of moderate intelligence here and there, in these books and reviews, it is not only obvious but blatant that *scholarship and critical insight have yet to be applied to contemporary poetry*. Given the current situation, they never will, unless it is by poets conferring amongst themselves because the most public organs for any real discourse have been—as in news of the world at large—pre-empted.

What follows is a year by year listing of books of poetry prominently reviewed in the trade press, as derived from the *Book Review Index*. The numbers in parentheses following each title are the number of reviews cited in the *Index*. Titles followed by an asterisk are published by small presses.

The listing is not comprehensive by any means. What I have attempted to do is to chronicle the attention lavished on certain poets whenever their books appear, and to indicate by immediate juxtaposition within each year books of considerable merit which were overlooked. In certain instances I include small press

books that received no reviews, but have done so only where I consider that an indisputable travesty occured by that oversight.

Some words are in order as to the actual use of such a list. First, the *Book Review Index* does not cite "little magazines," so reviews in such publications as *Caterpillar, Montemora* and *L = A = N = G = U = A = G = E* (three of the few such that *did* publish reviews) are not listed. This means that certain books by Dorn, Kelly, Duncan, Eshleman and others received some attention in sources other than those accounted for here. What such a list cannot chronicle is the little magazine devoting an issue or focusing a large part of an issue to a particular poet. Kenneth Irby's book *Catalpa* received no press reviews, yet a sufficient number of earnest readers welcomed it as one of the finest collections of the 1970s in a special issue of *Credences*.

In the end, however, the sources listed in the *Book Review Index* are the ones that count. It lists the journals that are essential to library purchases (*Library Journal, Booklist*), quarterlies servicing English teachers (*Kentucky Journal, Chicago Review, Virginia Quarterly Review*, etc.), and above all, the widely circulated newspapers and magazines (*The New Yorker, Time, The New York Review of Books, The New York Times Book Review, The Times Literary Supplement, The Nation, Atlantic, Harper's*, etc.). I offer the following key to what the number of reviews a book receives can mean: 1-7 reviews may be library and English department oriented, i.e., special interest; a book receiving 8 or more reviews invariably has one placed among the widely circulating periodicals cited above; 12 or more reviews generally mean 3 or 4 reviews in the most widely circulated sources. Twenty or more reviews means a contagion of preoccupation with a particular book or poet has occured. This means that a potential readership of millions has been contacted (though the number who *read* the reviews is surely much less).

Certain poets' careers seem to prove conclusively that the *publisher* is what really counts. Duncan's *Bending the Bow* got 18 reviews, while his small-press *Tribunals*—continuing the major long sequence from *Bending the Bow*, in fact—received only 3. Diane Wakoski has published voluminously with both trade and small presses; her small press books have never been as widely reviewed, though they *have* received more attention than most other poets' small press books. Poets often have prose publications—not listed here—which generally receive more reviews than their poetry. Examples would be Merwin's *Miner's Pale Children*, Rich's *Of Woman Born*, Dickey's *Deliverance*, Plath's *The Bell Jar*, etc. It goes without saying that when such a book appears concurrently with its author's poetry, the book of poems reaps a larger harvest of

reviews than it usually would. But again, small press publication is an impediment: Jim Harrison's widely reviewed novels made no difference in the case of his *Letters to Yesenin*, a Sumac book which didn't get a single trade review.

The most plausible argument against such a list as I've compiled here is that the sheer *number* of reviews a book receives is no indication as to the nature of those reviews. However, it's not my purpose to suggest that a book receives more favorable attention the more reviews it gets. But the amount of attention afforded a book gives it credibility. As an indication, the fourth most frequently reviewed title of all the years I list is *The Mind-Reader* by Richard Wilbur, an astonishing amount of attention for a lame collection receiving lackluster commendations (as one critic said, Wilbur is always "safe rather than sorry"). The point is, it doesn't matter that the poems didn't amount to much; the excessive attention sanctioned Wilbur as a poet of "stature." a major presence. Bluntly, this means that critics across the board tried to cover their tracks by penning notices, *just in case* Wilbur turns out to be the major figure he was hailed as in the 1950s. In turn, a recommendation by Wilbur printed on the flyleaf of a younger poet's book guarantees critical scrutiny, perpetuating a fierce downward spiral of mediocrity. It's still the saga of the Emperor's New Clothes that prevails: the critics all in a row titter and poke each other, then all get down to solemn details about the emboidery as the new poetic Godiva struts by.

1967

Robert Lowell, *Near the Ocean* (36); James Dickey, *Poems 1957-1967* (25); John Berryman, *Berryman's Sonnets* (20); Anthony Hecht, *The Hard Hours* (20); James Tate, *The Lost Pilot* (15); W.S. Merwin, *The Lice* (14); Anne Sexton, *Live or Die* (12); Ronald Johnson, *The Book of the Green Man* (11); Denise Levertov, *The Sorrow Dance* (9); Robert Creeley, *Words* (8); Louis Zukofsky, *All the Collected Shorter Poems* (7) and *"A" 1-12* (5); Robert Bly, *The Light Around the Body* (5); Paul Blackburn, *The Cities* (2); Edward Dorn, *The North Atlantic Turbine** (2)

1968

John Berryman, *His Toy, His Dream, His Rest* (24); W.D. Snodgrass, *After Experience* (23); Robert Duncan, *Bending the Bow* (18); Galway Kinnell, *Body Rags* (13); James Wright, *Shall We Gather at the River* (12); Mark Strand, *Reasons for Moving* (9); David Ignatow, *Rescue the Dead* (8); Allen Ginsberg, *Planet News** (6); Charles Olson, *Maximus IV, V, VI* (6); George Oppen, *Of Being Numerous* (5); Robert Duncan, *Derivations** (4) and *The First Decade**

(2); Jackson Mac Low, *22 Light Poems** (2); Charles Bukowski, *At Terror Street and Agony Way** (1); David Antin, *Code of Flag Behavior** (1); Edward Dorn, *Gunslinger, Book I** (1); Robert Kelly, *Songs I-XXX** (1) and *Finding the Measure**(0)

1969

Elizabeth Bishop, *The Complete Poems* (25); Randall Jarrell, *The Complete Poems* (20); Richard Wilbur, *Walking to Sleep* (20); Robert Lowell, *Notebook 1967-'68* (20); Anne Sexton, *Love Poems* (18) Robert Creeley, *Pieces* (18); James Merrill, *The Fire Screen* (15); John Logan, *The Zig-Zag Walk* (13); Adrienne Rich, *Leaflets* (10); Marvin Bell, *A Probable Volume of Dreams* (8); Diane Wakoski, *The Blood Factory* (8); David Wagoner, *New and Selected Poems* (8); Ronald Johnson, *Valley of the Many Colored Grasses* (6); Louis Zukofsky, *"A" 13-21* (5); Joel Oppenheimer, *In Time* (4); Jerome Rothenberg, *Poems 1964-1967** (3); Philip Whalen, *On Bear's Head* (2); Edward Dorn, *Gunslinger, Book II** (1)

1970

James Dickey, *The Eye Beaters, Blood, Victory and Madness* (17); John Ashbery, *The Double Dream of Spring* (17); A.R. Ammons, *Uplands* (16); William Meredith, *Earth Walk* (15); Gary Snyder, *Regarding Wave* (14); Mark Strand, *Darker* (13); William Stafford, *Allegiances* (12); David Ignatow, *Poems 1934-1969* (12); W.S. Merwin, *The Carrier of Ladders* (12); May Swenson, *Iconographs* (10); Denise Levertov, *Relearning the Alphabet* (9); Louise Gluck, *Firstborn* (8); James Tate, *The Oblivion Ha-Ha* (8); Irving Feldman, *The Magazine Papers* (8); Charles Olson, *Archeologist of Morning* (7); Michael McClure, *Star* (4); Robert Duncan, *Tribunals** (3); Phillip Whalen, *Severance Pay** (1)

1971

John Berryman, Love and Fame (24); Anne Sexton, *Transformations* (23); Sylvia Plath, *Crossing the Water* (19); A.R. Ammons, *Collected Poems 1951-1971* (19); Galway Kinnell, *The Book of Nightmares* (19); James Wright, *Collected Poems* (18); Diane Wakoski, *The Motorcycle Betrayal Poems* (16); Adrienne Rich, *The Will to Change* (15); A.R. Ammons, *Briefings* (14); Louis Simpson, *Adventures of the Letter I* (13); Stanley Kunitz, *The Testing-Tree* (12); Howard Moss, *Selected Poems* (11); John Haines, *The Stone Harp (11); Charles Simic, Dismantling the Silence* (11); Frank O'Hara, *Collected Poems*

(11); John Hollander, *The Night Mirror* (9); Denise Levertov, *To Stay Alive* (8); Jerome Rothenberg, *Poems For the Game of Silence* (6); Nathaniel Tarn, *A Nowhere for Vallejo* (5); Phillip Levine, *Red Dust** (4); Robert Kelly, *Flesh Dream Book** (2); Frank Samperi, *The Prefiguration* (0)

1972

John Berryman, *Delusions Etc.* (30); Sylvia Plath, *Winter Trees* (27); James Merrill, *Braving the Elements* (18); Anne Sexton, *A Book of Folly* (16); James Tate, *Absences* (13); Philip Levine, *They Feed They Lion* (13); Allen Ginsberg, *The Fall of America* (12); John Ashbery, *Three Poems* (12); Maxine Kumin, *Up Country* (12); Denise Levertov, *Footprints* (8); Robert Creeley, *A Day Book* (7); Diane Wakoski, *Smudging** (6); H.D., *Hermetic Definition* (4); George Oppen, *Seascape: The Needle's Eye** (3); Jackson Mac Low, *Stanzas for Iris Lezak** (2); Paul Blackburn, *Early Selected** (1)

1973

Robert Lowell, *The Dolphin* (26), *History* (25) and *For Lizzie and Harriet* (24); W.S. Merwin, *Writings to an Unfinished Accompaniment* (15); Adrienne Rich, *Diving into the Wreck* (15); James Wright, *Two Citizens* (14); Robert Bly, *Sleepers Joining Hands* (12); William Stafford, Someday, Maybe (12); Donald Justice *Departures* (10); Gregory Orr, *Burning the Empty Nests* (9); John Logan, *The Anonymous Lover* (7); Diane Wakoski, *Dancing on the Grave of a Son of a Bitch** (6); Frank Samperi, *Lumen Gloriae* (2); Robert Kelly, *The Mill of Particulars** (1); Clayton Eshleman, *Coils** (1); George Quasha, *Somapoetics** (0); Jim Harrison, *Letters to Yesenin** (0)

1974

Gary Snyder, *Turtle Island* (17); A.R. Ammons, *Sphere* (16); Anne Sexton, *The Death Notebooks* (15); Robert Penn Warren, *Or Else* (15); Mark Strand, *The Story of Our Lives* (12); Charles Wright, *Hard Freight* (11); Philip Levine, *1933* (11); Galway Kinnell, *The Avenue Bearing the Initial of Christ Into the New World* (11); Howard Moss, *Instant Lives* (11); Alan Dugan, *Poems 4* (9); John Hollander, *At the Head of the Bed* (9); Charles Simic, *Retuning to a Place Lit by a Glass of Milk* (8); Jerome Rothenberg, *Poland/1931* (7); William Everson, *Man-Fate* (6); Charles Reznikoff, *By the Well of Living and Seeing** (4); Michael McClure, *September Blackberries* (4) and *Rare Angel** (3); Charles Bukowski, *Burning in Water, Drowning in Flame** (2); David Bromige, *Tight Corners** (0); Kenneth Irby, *To Max Douglas** (0); Robin Blaser, Image-

Nations* (0); Robert Duncan, *Dante Etudes** (0); Clark Coolidge, *The Maintains** (0)

1975

John Ashbery, *Self Portrrait in a Convex Mirror* (34); Robert Penn Warren, *Selected Poems* (23); Adrienne Rich, *Poems Selected and New 1950-1974* (17); Anne Sexton, *The Awful Rowing Toward God* (16); John Hollander, *Tales Told of the Fathers* (15); Maxine Kumin, *House, Bridge, Fountain, Gate* (12); Howard Nemerov, *The Western Approaches* (12); A.R. Ammons, *Diversifications* (12); Denise Levertov, *The Freeing of the Dust* (12); Howard Moss, *The Buried City* (12); David Ignatow, *Facing the Tree* (11) and *Selected Poems* (10); Charles Wright, *Bloodlines* (9); Diane Wakoski, *Virtuoso Literature for Two and Four Hands* (9); Donald Finkel, *A Mote in Heaven's Eye* (9); Charles Olson, *The Maximus Poems, Volume 3* (9); David Wagoner, *Sleeping in the Woods* (8); Edward Dorn, *Slinger** (8) and *Collected Poems** (7); Gregory Orr, *Gathering the Bones Together* (7); Alfred Corn, *All the Roads At Once* (7); Robert Bly, *The Morning Glory* (6); Louis Zukofsky, *"A" 22-23* (6); Nathaniel Tarn, *Lyrics for the Bride of God* (3); Jack Spicer, *The Collected Books** (3); Clayton Eshleman, *The Gull Wall** (2); Howard McCord, *Selected Poems** (2); Paul Blackburn, *The Journals** (2); Michael McClure, *Jaguar Skies* (1); Thomas Meyer, *The Umbrella of Aesculapius** (1); Robert Kelly, *The Loom** (1); Theodore Enslin, *Synthesis** (0); Clark Coolidge, *Polaroid** (0)

1976

Richard Wilbur, *The Mind-Reader* (32); Robert Lowell, *Selected Poems* (28); John Berryman, *Henry's Fate* (26); Elizabeth Bishop, *Geography III* (23); James Merrill, *Divine Comedies* (19); Philip Levine, *The Names of the Lost* (16); Louise Gluck, *The House on the Marshland* (15); Anne Sexton, *45 Mercy Street* (14); James Tate, *Viper Jazz* (14); Philip Booth, *Available Light* (13); Robert Pinsky, *Sadness and Happiness* (13); Dave Smith, *Cumberland Station* (12); Carolyn Forche, *Gathering the Tribes* (12); John Hollander, *Reflections on Espionage* (11); Howard Moss, *A Swim off the Rocks* (11); Theodore Weiss, *Fireweeds* (10); Irving Feldman, *Leaping Clear* (10); Robert Creeley, *Selected Poems* (10); David Wagoner, *Collected Poems 1956-1976* (8); John Bricuth, *The Heisenberg Variations* (7); David Antin, *Talking at the Boundaries* (6); David Meltzer, *Six* (1); Michael Davidson, *The Mutabilities** (1); Charles Reznikoff, *The Complete Poems, Vol. 1** (1); Ed Sanders, *20,000 A.D.** (0)

1977

Robert Lowell, *Day by Day* (45); John Ashbery, *Houseboat Days* (34); Howard Nemerov, *Collected Poems* (22); A.R. Ammons, *The Snow Poems* (19); W.S. Merwin, *The Compass Flower* (18); Anthony Hecht, *The Mill of Strange Shadows* (18); James Wright, *To a Blossoming Pear Tree* (17); Charles Wright, *China Trace* (14); William Stafford, *Stories That Could Be True* (13); Olga Broumas, *Beginning with 0* (12); Ellen Bryan Voigt, *Claiming Kin* (11); Robert Bly, *This Body Is Made of Camphor and Gopherwood* (11); Marvin Bell, *Stars Which See, Stars Which Do Not See* (11); W.D. Snodgrass, *The Fuhrer Bunker* (11); Charles Simic, *Charon's Cosmology* (10); Allen Ginsberg, *Mind Breaths** (10); Howard Moss, *Tigers and Other Lilies* (9); Diane Wakoski, *Waiting for the King of Spain** (6); Anselm Hollo, *Sojourner Microcosms** (4); Michael Palmer, *Without Music** (3); Ronald Johnson, *Radi Os** (2); Duncan McNaughton, *Sumeriana** (1); Gerrit Lansing, *The Heavenly Tree Grows Downward** (0); Kenneth Irby, *Catalpa** (0)

1978

James Merrill, *Mirabell* (24); Adrienne Rich, *The Dream of a Common Language* (20); Mark Strand, *The Late Hour* (19); Robert Penn Warren, *Now and Then* (19); Howard Nemerov, *Figures of Thought* (18); Maxine Kumin, *The Retrieval System* (15); Alfred Corn, *A Call in the Midst of the Crowd* (14); Mark Strand, *The Monument* (12); May Swenson, *New and Selected Things Taking Place* (12); John Hollander, *Spectral Emanations* (11) Marge Piercy, *The 12-Spoked Wheel Flashing* (10); David Ignatow, *Tread the Dark* (10); Diane Wakoski, *The Man Who Shook Hands* (8); Michael McClure, *The Antechamber* (4); Jerome Rothenberg, *A Seneca Journal* (3); Robert Kelly, *The Convections** (2); Clayton Eshleman, *What She Means** (2); Lyn Hejinian, *Writing Is an Aid to Memory** (2); Charles Reznikoff, *Testimony, Vol. 1** (2); Ron Silliman, *Ketjak** (1); Bob Perelman, *7 Works** (1); Christopher Dewdney, *Spring Trances in the Control Emerald Night** (1); William Everson, *The Veritable Years** (1); Clark Coolidge, *Own Face** (1) and *Quartz Hearts** (0); Theodore Enslin, *Ranger, Book 1** (0)

1979

Stanley Kunitz, *Poems 1928-1978* (24); John Ashbery, *As We Know* (21); Anthony Hecht, *Venetian Vespers* (20); Philip Levine, *Seven Years from Somewhere* (19); Donald Justice, *Selected Poems* (18); Philip Levine, *Ashes* (17); Howard Moss, *Notes from the Castle* (15); Irving Feldman, *New and Selected*

Poems (15); Robert Creeley, *Later* (15); Robert Bly, *This Tree Will Be Here for a Thousand Years* (13); Dave Smith, *Goshawk, Antelope* (12); John Hollander, *Blue Wine* (11); Sandra McPherson, *The Year of Our Birth* (10); Louis Zukofsky, *"A"* (8); David Wagoner, *In Broken Country* (7); Imamu Baraka (LeRoi Jones), *Selected Poems* (6); Robert Pinsky, *An Explanation of America* (6); W.H. Matthews, *Rising and Falling* (6); Barbera Einzig, *Disappearing Work** (2); Jackson Mac Low, *The Pronouns** (0); John Taggart, *Dodeka** (0); Thomas Meyer, *Staves, Calends, Legends** (0); John Clarke, *The End of This Side** (0); Jonathan Williams, *Elite/Elate Poems** (0); Mei-Mei Bersenbrugge, *Random Possession** (0); Duncan McNaughton, *Shit on My Shoes** (0)

1980

[Helen Vendler, *Part of Nature, Part of Us* (25)]; Robert Penn Warren, *Being Here* (25); James Merrill, *Scripts for the Pageant* (12); Louis Simpson, *Caviare at the Funeral* (11); Charles Simic, *Classic Ballroom Dances* (11); Frederick Seidel, *Sunrise* (11); Galway Kinnell, *Mortal Acts, Mortal Words* (11); Alfred Corn, *The Various Light* (10); William Meredith, *The Cheer* (9); Philip Booth, *Before Sleep* (8); Robert Mazzocco, *Trader* (8); Jerome Rothenberg, *Vienna Blood* (5); Louise Gluck, *Descending Figure* (3); Philip Whalen, *Enough Said** (3); Rosmarie Waldrop, *When They Have Senses** (1); Lyn Hejinian, *My Life** (0); Charles Stein, *Horse Sacrifice** (0); Gustal Sobin, *Wind Chrysalid Rattle** (0); Leland Hickman, *The Great Slave Lake Suite** (0); Barrett Watten, *1-10** (0)

1981

John Ashbery, *Shadow Train* (25); Robert Penn Warren, *Rumour Verified* (22); Carolyn Forche, *The Country Between Us* (17); Dave Smith, *Dream Flights* (15); Philip Levine, *One For the Rose* (14); Andrienne Rich, *A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far* (14); David Ignatow, *Whisper to Earth* (8); Donald Finkel, *What Manner of Beast* (8); Robert Bly, *The Man in the Black Coat Turns* (8); Dave Smith, *Homage to Edgar Allan Poe* (8); Marvin Bell, *These Green-Going-to-Yellow* (8); William Bronk, *Life Supports* (8); David Wagoner, *Landfall* (7); Charles Wright, *The Southern Cross* (7); Clayton Eshleman, *Hades in Manganese** (4); Philip Lamatia, *Becoming Visible** (2); Michael Palmer, *Notes for Echo Lake* (2); Ronald Johnson, *Ark* (2); Ron Silliman, *Tjanting** (1); Cark Coolidge, *American Ones** (0); Robert Kelly, *The Alchemist to Mercury** (0)

1. Edward Dorn, *Hello, La Jolla* (Berkeley: Wingbow, 1978) p. 80
2. Charles Molesworth, *The Fierce Embrace* (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1979) pp. 8-9
3. These citations are from *Book Review Digest 1980*, p. 1252
4. Helen Vendler, *Part of Nature, Part of Us* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1980) p. 92
5. Vendler, "On the Thread of Language," *New York Review of Books*, March 3, 1983, pp. 19-22
6. Vendler, *Part of Nature, Part of Us*, p. 156
7. *ibid*,. p. 136
8. *ibid*., p. 152
9. *ibid*., p. 127
10. *ibid*., p. 125
11. *ibid*., p. 369
12. *ibid*., p. 357
13. *ibid*., p. 120
14. Vendler, "America a Prophecy," *New York Times Book Review*, Dec. 30, 1973, pp. 6-8
15. Geoffrey Thurley, *The American Moment* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977) and Eric Homberger, *The Art of the Real* (London: Dent, 1977)
16. Homberger, *ibid*., pp. 211 and 230 respectively
17. Jonathan Holden, *The Rhetoric of the Contemporary Lyric*; (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1982) p. 9
18. Cary Nelson, *Our Last Firsts Poets* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1982) p. 10
19. *ibid*., p. 4
20. Molesworth, *op cit*., p. 66
21. *ibid*., p. 73
22. George Oppen's *Of Being Numerous* was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1969, but it received only five reviews, surely an all time low for a prize-winning book.
23. Marjorie Perloff cited in Homberger, *op cit*., p. 121
24. I mean specifically that the critical studies omit any significant treatment of the alternative press tradition as an historical fact, and that (apart from a few incidental exceptions) they uniformly deal only with trade and university press poetry. The books of the last ten years, chronologically: Robert Shaw, ed., *American Poetry Since 1960* (Cheshire, England: Carcanet, 1973); Ralph J.Mills, *The Cry of the Human* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1975); George Lensing and Ronald Moran, *Four Poets and the Emotive Imagination* (Baton Rouge: L.S.U. Press, 1976); David Kalstone, *Five Temperaments* (N.Y.: Oxford Univ. Press, 1976); Karl Malkoff, *Escape from the Self* (N.Y.: Columbia Univ. Press, 1977); Laurence Lieberman, *Unassigned Frequencies* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1977); Robert Pinsky, *The Situation of Poetry* (Princeton Univ. Press, 1977); Arthur Oberg, *The Modern American Lyric* (Rutgers Univ. Press, 1978); Charles Altieri, *Enlarging the Temple* (Lewisburg: Bucknell Univ. Press, 1979); Charles Molesworth, *op cit*., 1979; Richard Howard, *Alone With America* (N.Y.: Atheneum, 2nd ed., 1980); Helen Vendler, *op cit*., 1980; Jonathan Holden, *op cit*., 1982; Cary Nelson, *op cit*., 1982. The more energized social attitude of Eric Homberger and Geoffrey Thurley of England, *op cit*., distinguishes their books from those listed above, at least in terms of an awareness of the discrepancy between published poetry and critical assessment in America.

JED RASULA

Dear Don Byrd:

I was reading in the paper today about "friendly fire" (bombs from our side that drop on the troops) as a not unfriendly preliminary to a criticism of your article in *Sulfur 8*. The initial gambit, toward the newspaper cliché of the "baby boom," seems quite at odds with what follows, which is a discussion of the production of works of value. I rather resent the implication that anyone marked for life by having been born after WWII is doomed to permanent overproduction or response to same. You don't need to say this, and it goes nowhere—so the review really begins with the discussion of horse pictures, that is, normative art. Even here the distance from the work you're trying to get back to is generalizing. The separation between "us" and "them" (APR poets) doesn't propose much of a reading of either, but if there is one it's more accurate to the normative. The "counter-normative" is not solely defined as such, and the motivation for the writing of the works is left, therefore, in a kind of blind dark alley of intentions (the dark side of human nature that someone on an expense account is likely to forget). This reminds me of the incoherent humanism of the Stalinist left—a losing tactic, as the identification it proposes is always false and only the basis for cooptation. The best you can do is to say that this is pretty radical stuff, which indicates to me that you don't know how to read it.

Your sense of Coolidge as an abstract expressionist sheds some light on his production, but still the mode is taken as an abstract, static possibility. I see this in numbers of responses to Coolidge's work (*vide* MP's, who should know better or at least be interested to say something of interest for his own sake, or Bernadette Mayer, who usefully points to Coolidge's access to "everything"), making me glad to have published Lydia Davis's article, which at least tags some of the specific inputs so that a reading can occur. You seem not interested in the obvious thematics in Coolidge—in the case of your quote, the holding back, questioning of self, and resistance to other—ending for CC in the near-automatic. Yes, there is something of abstract expressionism in Coolidge's making of automatic impulse into a wound—it's like the American take on Surrealism is "out of a job and going batty"—which certainly could be developed,

in your piece, at the expense of "the present."

Your paragraph on critical and speculative thinking might go somewhere if it were connected with particular works, but that would involve an assessment of method of the various writers taken up, something that is markedly absent.

The readings that follow are all too brief. The thesis that what you quoted of mine is there to "create stasis and to frustrate production" is simply wrong. It should be stimulating and fun to make a reading out of the four lines quoted—there is a thematic argument, several, and as the four poems in the book develop, they become essential rather than deconstructive. For instance, the sequence "word"—"middle distance"—"body"—"car"—"you" is easily about prototypical forms. All those terms are in the same area of mental projection; they could overlap, as in an n-space Venn diagram. The juxtaposition with "each population" and "every testimony" is a comment on the growing polarization between such minimal forms (what, indeed, is a "person") and the pull of atomized, contradictory information—that is, the world as we know it but don't want to. I think that's enough to indicate the possibility of a determinate reading.

Carla's dedication to me leads you into a comparison of how the sentences work in her work, leaving out the most obvious differene, which is that her work is in prose, has narrative, characters, a play, several subsections—i.e., it is completely differently organized, with an entirely other value for sequence. You identify only a minimal formal motivation in the hermeticism of some progessions taken out of context, which is a great way to make them hermetic. I mean, there is subversion and parody, but don't leave out Uncle.

And so on. As the article goes on, you seem to be getting more and more exhausted with the task at hand, which is, for the reader, increasingly seeming like a task. What you say about Robinson and Inman is marginally OK for starters but forgets that Inman is a radically disjunct, zaum poet, while Robinson is writing in refractive, meditative verse forms in which the continuity of thought is central. Not quoting from Bernheimer and Benson makes me wonder why you included them in the review, and Rodefer is certainly a good place to sign off, as his sense of "debris" does underscore the kind of leveling that many people would like to think is the project of a "language-centered" writing. In sum, there does seem to be a kind of thematic argument in your

piece along these lines, running from the baby boom to the normative which must be subverted, to the somewhat anonymous proliferation of writers that basically seem to be saying the same thing, using the same procedures, with the angry Jehovist clouds of Coolidge as abstract-expressionist in the historical background as a basis for belief.

As Wittgenstein said, "I'll teach you differences," and I wish that reviewers would make that the test of their reviews. I am getting tired of being lumped together--by a reading that cannot deal with its own limits--with other writers who quite properly should be recognized as having motives and methods of their own.

BARRETT WATTEN

A Case of AIDS Hysteria

Rolling Stock is a cultural newspaper edited by Ed and Jennifer Dorn and published from the University of Colorado. Its latest issue, "numero 5," devotes a full page—written, I gather, in collaboration with Tom Clark—to "the 1983 AIDS AWARDS FOR POETRY—In recognition of the current EPIDEMIC OF IDIOCY on the poetry scene." The page features a large illustration of a test-tube of reddish liquid, presumably infected blood, the "prize." At the bottom of the page is a photograph of two Oriental men in suits wearing Micky Mouse caps. The caption reads, "To date 1300 cases of AIDS POETRY have been reported in the U.S."

The recipients of this honor are Dennis Cooper ("for writing the most AIDS-like line of the year: 'Mark's anus is wrinkled, pink, and simplistically rendered, but cute.' "); Clayton Eshleman (for "attacking a dead—and thus harmless—poet, Elizabeth Bishop," in a review in the *L.A. Times*);Robert Creeley (for

writing extravagant blurbs for books by Stephen Rodefer and Joanne Kyger); Steve Abbott ("for accusing everybody who doesn't like him or his poetry of 'rabid homophobia' "); Allen Ginsberg (for claiming he wrote some lyrics for the rock group The Clash, when supposedly he hadn't); and finally, "WRITE-IN CANDIDATE" ("Fill in the name of your favorite POETRY IDIOT here.").

As "idiocy" goes—even poetry "idiocy"—these strike me as rather obscure misdemeanors. Cooper's line is hardly worth singling out, one way or the other. The Ginsberg is strictly a "so what" item, and the Abbott clearly the product of a personal grudge—in any event, no evidence is given to support the charges. Creeley's liking for Rodefer and Kyger and Eshleman's dislike of Bishop is scarcely cause for alarm: In fact, I'm more alarmed that Dorn and Clark, of all people, feel that Bishop, of all people, needs protection from the barbarians trampling on her grave.

The presenting of awards to "idiots" has always been a favored pasttime for sophomoric wits. Luckily the sophomoric wits of poetry usually find other things to do, like writing grants proposals. Here, however, *Rolling Stock* is merely picking up where Robert Bly's *Fifties/Sixties/Seventies* left off. But Dorn and Clark have considerably raised the stakes from Bly's "Blue Toad," or whatever it was: For these supposed infractions of good taste, they not only wish the poets dead, but dead after a long and particularly gruesome disease.

It's not at all funny. And *Rolling Stock's* choice of AIDS as the vehicle of death is positively sinister. It has only one reading: if AIDS is "idiocy," then clearly the "idiots" are AIDS-victims, that is, gay men. For Cooper, Ginsberg and Abbott, who are publicly known as homosexual, it means: Those faggots should drop dead. For Creeley and Eshleman, publicly known as heterosexual, it means: They're idiots, therefore faggots, therefore they should drop dead from faggot disease. (And as for Orientals in Micky Mouse caps—presumably more "idiotic" than whites in similar attire—they can drop dead too.)

Sickening and pointless, its utter irrelevancy makes the matter barely worth mentioning. But admirers of Dorn, who are many, and of Clark, who are some, now face the task of recovering the poetry from the macho slobber. And the University of Colorado and the Boulder Arts Commission will, I hope, reconsider supporting this stoned/cute version of the hate sheet.

Most depressing is that these poets, like a village on the fringe of the Empire,

can only reduce the news, when it reaches them, to family squabbles. Meanwhile people are dropping dead from AIDS, and its discovery has unleashed a wave of homophobia, both verbal and active. Worse, it has become the right-wing's counter to cancer as *the* moral disease of the age. If cancer, as various liberationists have proclaimed, is the body's response to passion unnaturally repressed by society or personality, then AIDS, according to the right, is the result of unnatural passion: homosexuality itself, or promiscuous, "depersonalized" homosexuality.

There is no doubt that AIDS is widely seen—even by some of its victims—as the wrath of God. This mythologizing of disease not only erects enormous barriers to treatment and potential cure, but it also promotes a climate of fear that extends far beyond AIDS itself. Hell becomes other people: the "idiots" among us, out not only to physically destroy us, but to destroy our family structure, our "American" values. The current AIDS hysteria is merely an exaggerated and particularly shameless form of the continuing national dementias of racism and anticommunism.

Rolling Stock demonstrates how easily the objects of fear and hatred become jumbled: homosexuals, AIDS-vicims, Orientals, authors of book-jacket blurbs—"idiots" all. I once would have thought Dorn and Clark to be unlikely mouthpieces for Reagan America.

ELIOT WEINBERGER

Some Thoughts on Conferencing

Parole, as the Derrideans never tire of telling us, is not prior to *écriture*. Maybe not, but one would never know it from studying the list of "Forthcoming Meetings and Conferences of General Interest" published in each issue of PLMA. For the month of October 1983 alone, I count no fewer than 80 conferences listed as being of possible interest to MLA members. My favorites include:

Deciding What to Know: The Professional Authorizatrion of Knowledge in the Humanities, 29 Sept.—2 Oct. 1983, Indiana University.

Robert Cormier: I AM THE CHEESE—The Book, the Film and the Author, 8 Oct. 1983, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio.

Romanticism in the Old World and the New: Stendal, Zhukovskii, and Washington Irving, 13-16 October 1983, Hofstra University.

Business and Culture in the Emergence of German as a National Language, 28-29 Oct., UCLA.

And I haven't even mentioned *Chautauqua in Mississippi: The History of the Small Town*, to be held at Mississippi State University on October 12-14, or the *Rocky Mountain Conference on British Studies* at the University of Colorado, Boulder.

The Literary Life, the Life of the Humanist, is increasingly given over to such activities. Indeed, it is not too much to say that conferencing has become, for many of us, a way of life. The conference, for example, functions as a vacation-substitute: it proffers not only tax-free holidays but most of the other amenities of life: sex, companionship, shared meals (always), good food and drink (sometimes), politics, even a sense of religious communion. The conference has, in short, largely replaced the prayer meeting or Chautauqua, the family gathering, the dinner party. For at the conference, there are no hosts and guests in the traditional sense, and yet everyone sits at the table. The conference has, moreover, a particular rhythm reassuring to its participants: it begins on a low-key note as the participants eye one another warily; by the end, they are all embracing and exchanging phone numbers and addresses with the enthusiasm of ten-year olds on the last day of summer camp.

The road to conference serfdom is paved with good intentions. So I found, this past August, when I participated in three very different (and more or less equally useless) conferences. The first was the IAUPE (International Association of University Professors of English), a group that meets triennially in an "exotic" or especially interesting place. This year the IAUPE met in Hamburg, a city less than exotic although very pretty; the papers at the 5-day meeting ranged from Old Norse to Postmodernism, the panel at which I was invited to speak. The conference includes numerous social activities: for example, a boat

ride down the Elbe, a visit to an organ recital in old Lünenburg, a dinner in a Rathskeller, and so on.

By the second day, I realized I was learning virtually nothing. Certain famous professors proceeded to give papers that I have heard them give on other occasions; indeed, some of these papers had already found their way into print. But conference goers tend to be peculiarly tolerant: the same people who would attack a particular argument were it in print, sit patiently smiling when Professor X reads it out loud. Such is the force of *la parole*. Some of the other papers contained so little scholarly evidence that I would not have accepted them from my undergraduates; yet all the speakers were full professors. Sexism, at this particular conference, was rampant. Thus a well-known (male) Shakespearean scholar from Britain introduced a female speaker on his panel as follows: "M.T. is a woman. A lady. I don't know where to place her on the spectrum from Eve to Marilyn Monroe or Germaine Greer. I don't know if she is a feminist or an anti-feminist. I do know, however, that like Portia and Rosalind, she is a RENAISSANCE lady. . ." and so on. The audience, whose average age seemed to be roughly 70 (it takes a long time to become a full professor in most European countries!) was not offended. Indeed, so little did any of the conferees seem to care about LITERATURE, that the presentation of papers was largely a filler between more substantive activities like the performance (free to members) of Verdi's *Othello* by the Hamburg opera or the final banquet at which there were many toasts and the usual exchange of addresses.

I was sure my next conference would be different. The subject was (again for me) Postmodernism and I was to speak on "Postmodernism and the Crisis of Lyric." The site was the French national conference center at Cerisy-la-Salle; the symposium was organized by the International Circle for Research in Philosophy, a group based in Austin, Texas and founded by the Menil Foundation. Professor Robert Magiola of Purdue, who invited me a full 14 months ahead of time, listed among the speakers Jean-Francois Lyotard, Douglas Davis, and Pierre Boulez. But alas, the day before I was to drive to Normandy, I received a phone call in Paris from one of the other organizers, informing me that many of the promised speakers had "defected." This turned out to be quite an understatement: only when I arrived in Cerisy did I realize that, indeed, the bulk (poets, philosophers, artists, composers, performers) had defected, leaving me to spar with some fairly tired Heideggerians and to smile

at the Valery Larbaud seminar which occupied two of the four tables in the dining room. Indeed, one friendly conferee confessed to me that he was on our program only because he was honeymooning in the vicinity of Cerisy and thought he might use the conference as a tax deduction.

The main thing I learned about postmodernism at the Cerisy conference is that postmodernists no longer seem to know any language other than their own. The same professors who can discourse learnedly on the meaning of *Dasein* in Heidegger, become very nervous when someone asks them in French for the sugar; conversely, during the papers given in English, two French ladies repeatedly nudged me with such questions as "Qu'a-t-il dit sur Foucault?" One Heideggerian, accused by two others of misrepresenting the great philosopher, said defensively, "Well, that's MY Heidegger!" This is a phrase I shall remember for another conference. At another session, in which Syberberg's *Parsifal* was under discussion, a Hungarian and a Frenchman were busy insisting that this was a decadent, kitch, Nazi film when suddenly an American interjected that the rupture of the rock, which occurs at the opening of the film, was assuredly Postmodern. And that was more or less that.

My third conference was the Humanities Institute held at USC during the first week of September. Unlike the other two, this one was for real. My fellow-correspondent for *Sulfur*, Jim Clifford, led an inspired session on "Reassessing Gregory Bateson." There was a superb session on the Bible and another on tropologies of history; I myself gave one of three papers on Wallace Stevens' *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction*; the other two speakers were Michael Davidson and Charles Altieri, both well known to *Sulfur* readers.

The only problem at this particular conference was that the attendance was extremely low: even the governing board was largely absent (8 out of 12 missing). True, it was 100 degrees and smoggy in Los Angeles; true, it was the first week of classes at USC and the Jewish New Year came just the day before. Still, there should have been more than 25 stragglers to hear Harry Berger of UC-Santa Cruz give a brilliant paper on the political values of the Old Testament.

Why, in the face of all I have said about the conference being a way of life was attendance so low? Partly because the Humanities Institute, founded just last year by a group of our Northern California colleagues, was not well advertised. But, more important, people didn't attend because, as my own colleagues told

me, there were too many unrelated topics. Each day, there were four sessions on the four different subjects: Biblical hermeneutics, history, anthropology, poetry. Theoretically, then, everyone would attend all sessions, since, say, the three poetry papers were on three different days. But this is precisely what brought objections from would-be conferees. Why, it was said repeatedly, should someone interested in the Bible sit through a paper on the Supreme Fiction?

Why indeed? What I learned at the Humanities Institute, quite aside from the interesting things I learned about Gregory Bateson or about Barcelona politics in the thirties, is that academics of the eighties are no longer intellectuals. At the IAUPE in Hamburg everyone was happy—not because of the quality of the papers, which were quite beside the point but because of the "extras" like the boat trip on the Elbe and the performance of *Othello*. Besides, the conference costs were tax-deductible and there were many retired professors among us. Again, at the Postmodernism Conference at Cerisy, the conferees were satesfied enough because they were sparring with one another about the meaning of the word *postmodern* and classifying poets as being (or not being) postmodern. But at the Humanities Institute, where there was a chance to hear real papers, papers with some substance, interest was low. After all, where was the boat trip, the Rathskeller, the free theatre performance, the champagne?

While I was foolishly running from one conference to the next, up in Orono, Maine, Carroll "Terry" Terrell was running the conference I wish I *had* attended. Perhaps the grass is always greener. . .but, no, the William Carlos Williams conference was, from all accounts, a total joy. The papers were stimulating; the after-hours talk, as always in Orono, even more stimulating. Robert Creeley and Allen Ginsberg gave very moving papers. The last day, Allen Ginsberg's friend evidently took off all his clothes and came up to the blackboard while Hugh Kenner was giving his talk; he wrote "Love and Peace" on the board and made his exit. Hugh Kenner never stopped reading his paper.

That's the funny part but there is a more serious side. I have been asking myself for years why Terry Terrell always manages to orchestrate such superb conferences. No stale papers, already heard at other conferences, are presented. Everyone who is there is genuinely intrerested in the subject, in this case Williams (in the past, most often Pound). Defectors are in the minority. Yet registrants have to pay their way to the conference and, with rare exceptions,

no one receives an honorarium.

What is Terry's secret? Partly, no doubt, the particularity of the conference subject so that the complaints about smorgasbord, heard at the Humanities Institute, don't apply. But this is only part of the story. More important, I think, is that, unlike the other conferences I have been describing, the Maine symposium was nobody's ego trip. Power, authority, prestige—the ruling principles at most conferences—don't operate here. If Ginsberg and Kenner were speakers, so were any number of unknown graduate students. At Orono, everyone participates in the discussions. There is no elitist governing board, as is the case in the Humanities Institute, and I don't know of anyone who has written on Williams and genuinely wanted to give a paper who was not invited to do so. People come from all over the country (indeed, from all over the world) because they are genuinely interested in William Carlos Williams and because they will come away having learned something new. It is a rare instance of art triumphing over academe. But I'm afraid it makes little dent on the profession which keeps on grinding its wheels, inventing non-conferences for non-intellectuals. After all, without the reassurance of the conference, we might have to stay at home and do something non-academic like read a book!

And yet, and yet. . . I met three interesting British professors at the IAUPE. One of them has already sent me two of his essays on subjects close to my heart. And at Cerisy-la-Salle, I had some valuable conversations on East-West politics with a Hungarian mathematician. And last week an editor called me up who had heard my paper at the Humanities Institute and wants to publish it. Back home after the conference, we forget the frustration and the boredom. "Didn't I meet you at Cerisy?" says a friendly young woman in the UCLA library. And so, who knows, when the next invitation comes along. I may be foolish enough to say yes. In the meantime, I can always attend a conference listed in PMLA as *Independent Scholars in the Eighties: Making Connections*. It's in San Francisco and we all know what a great gourmet city that is.

MARJORIE PERLOFF

A Note on the State of H.D.'s *The Gift*

There would seem to be much in favor of conserving and eventually publishing the finished works and important documentation of writers. The few arguments against can be touching and interested on a personal level, but embody no permanently useful editorial principle.[1] It remains true that a writer's words are both her/his signature and a cultural posession; if changed or suppressed, the picture that can be discerned of any poetic and social practice, and the cultural meanings these make will be altered, perhaps substantially. Sappho did not, we vaguely remember, compose in fragments.

A text is already a set of negotiations with silence, with silencing, with discourses and positions. Every mark, from its pace to the specific and possibly untoward associations moving from sentence to sentence offer meanings which can define author, time, community. Further, while we know for many writers how the production and reception of work may be touchy issues, we often (smugly?) assume that the dissemination of work is not problematic. The book, to cite Jabès, is "rewritten by the reader"; in that insight of the dimensions of a text comes a rare joy. We are far less theoretically tickled to find the book rewritten by the publisher.

New Directions' publication of H.D.'s *The Gift* hardly destroys that work; complete typescripts exist at The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, and may be consulted, even, with further permission, photocopied. But the publication of the New Directions *Gift*, given the level and pertinacity of the cuts sustained, does substantially alter our picture of this important, finished autobiographical meditation. These cuts are further complicated by being veiled: no explanatory note by the editor is set forth, no in-text indications are offered; no principle of exclusion or excision is developed. Yet the work we read is rather less than H.D. wrote.[2]

One kind of question—sometimes less relevant than it appears—is still worth posing: did the author finish the work? A letter of H.D. to Norman Holmes Pearson, 22 December 1949, should set any skeptic at rest about the author's level of attention.

> And I have most carefully gone over THE GIFT. There are a few spelling

> mistakes, but I think this better be the final copy, for I would have to get right back to the Blitz-mood to re-write or re-cast the last chapter. After all, considering it, after these years away from London, it is pretty intense; I mean, the last chapter. And Norman, it is not easy to get a thing like that actual reality-scene into words; and the last section, MORNING STAR does sum up the DARK ROOM, the terror by night, the last unutterable threat of some horrible end. It reads rather prose-poem, I am not too keen on that phrase or word, prose-poem, but there is that intense drive in the last chapter (in all, in fact) but it is a story of DEATH AND ITS MYSTERY, as first quote under section DARK ROOM.[3]

This statement provides at least evidence of coherence of the book's trajectory and evidence that its style and pulse are desired and intentionally produced. The citation also begins to reveal what any larger scale reading of *The Gift* needs to acknowledge: the book is about an initiation into a universal community of suffering and transfiguration. It is certainly, then, the complement of *Trilogy*, which is written immediately after.

In her work, H.D. parses a gift: more than creativity, more than heritage, more than talent, it is some visionary capacity of profound social and historical use in a redemptive drama. Although *The Gift* is autobiographical, each image, story, gesture, moment and memory occurs to be connected to another dimension of knowledge. This gift is not meant for individual illumination alone, but is a vehicle for grace within and across communities. Of special importance to placing H.D. within a context of feminist critique, the book is a clear rejection of political hierarchies and dominance, a unity of creeds and races through parallel spiritual gifts. This work may also be used to place H.D. in a tradition of American literature that draws on shamanistic Indian practices. In short, the individual, apparently the subject here, is an instrument of, a conduit for this spiritual politics: "a vision of power and peace." (*Gift*, 135) *The Gift* is, therefore, an intentionally religious and prophetic text. Cuts that remove this dimension of the text have changed its basic premises.

Other commentators who collate the published version with the manuscript housed at Beinecke Library will undoubtedly be able to trace all the patterns of loss. Here I have simply noted a few which seem important to H.D.'s purpose. Many moments of lyrical reflection and meditaion, crucial to *The Gift*, a number in every single chapter are deleted without any editorial indication, including Chapter 2 (entirely cut). Often these cuts contained images and

thematic material that linked chapter to chapter—the motifs of fire and of Christmas, the presence of Moravian wisdom tales, the shifts into another "dimension." Here the reader sustains losses personal, historical and spiritual: the descriptions of being a civilian under the bombs of World War II, the Moravian history—a mixture of mysticism and political critique—were included by H.D. to establish the book's spiritual politics. There are also cuts that inhibit the reader's knowledge of the "moving pictures"—those practices of visualization vital to H.D.'s poetics.

Let me be even more precise, with one example. In Chapter 4, six pages of typescript have been cut from the opening of the chapter. In them, H.D. has accumulated a forceful set of memories and experiences "held in the grip of vital terror" during the Blitz—under fire that is—contributing to both the root metaphor and the fact of the whole text (which was composed during the bombing). The mixture of dread and joyous confrontation of an exposed individual contemplating mass death recurs in (and is cut from) the final chapter as well.

To get a sense of what has occurred, readers might want to compare the first chapter in its two published versions: New Directions' cut text, and the complete chapter presented in *Montemora* 8.[4] Without the poetics of "moving pictures" which joins the individual to community and to the human race through time, the warm scenes of family life and wonder get unframed, reduced somewhat to pleasant vignettes and sketches, bereft of their "fourth dimension." The gift is after all the empathetic capacity to fuse the immanent and the transcendental. Cutting one-half of that fusion—the spiritual awe—does exactly compromise the gift about which H.D. is writing. All in all, one statement, itself cut from the New Directions version, makes a pungent commentary on what is lost.

> The dream, the memory, the unexpected related memories must be allowed to sway backward and forward, as if the sheet or screen upon which they are projected, blows and is rippled in the wind of whatever emotion or idea is entering a door, left open. The wind blows through the door, from outside, through long, long corridors of personal memory, of biological and of race-memory. Shut the door and you have a neat flat picture.[5]

The act of making these cuts shuts the door.

Cutting paragraphs—even no matter what they say!—means the rhythm of

discovery, the pause and pulse, the pace as H.D. desired it happen is lost to the reader. In addition to these types of excision throughout every chapter, and in addition to the loss of chapter 2 (a muted annunciation of H.D.'s birth and her prenatal inheritance of second sight) some lesser editorial changes have occurred that bit by bit accrete to change the texture of the work. All but one of H.D.'s chapter epigrams are removed; the one remaining, alluded to by H.D. in her letter to Pearson, is misplaced to head the whole text, not the first chapter. H.D.'s section markers within chapters, indicating units of thought, have been alternatively suppressed and presented. Much of H.D.'s capitalization, creating both a child's voice and an adult's symbolic reflection, has been normalized.

The one hint that this cutting has occurred comes in a few sentences by Perdita Schaffner in one of the several remarkable memoirs of H.D.—essays pensive, alert, subtle and humane—which she has recently written.[6] Despite my deference to Mrs. Schaffner's insights and knowledge, I think I must argue that the cutting of H.D.'s *The Gift* does negatively affect the spirit of this work. While acknowledging the drastic nature of the cuts, Perdita Schaffner takes a balanced position that suggests the full text is for scholars while the New Directions text is for the general public.[7]

In order to be true to the full and intended meaning of this text, New Directions might well rethink its strategy of partial presentation and publish a second and complete edition of *The Gift*.

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1. Such arguments were made by Ted Hughes presenting his *fiat*: the destruction of a journal of Sylvia Plath and the suppression of others, and as well the loss of half a novel called *Double Exposure*.

2. One might fruitfully compare the careful editing accorded Virginia Woolf, e.g. by Jeanne Schulkind in *Moments of Being* in which several excisions are noted. The context of the Woolf makes the reader assume personal matters are being excised. The context of *The Gift* differs; it is almost as if the person(s) achieving these cuts made them because the material was considered boring. Even assuming this is completely correct, still it is an unfairness to H.D. to protect her from our judgment of her own *longeurs*, since the subject, recurrence, nature and meaning of the tedium provided by any author is necessary for a complete understanding of her or his work.

3. Grateful acknowledgement to cite this letter is made to the Collection of American Literature, the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. All in-text citations of *The Gift* come as well from that collection. All H.D. material copyright 1984 by the Estate of Hilda Doolittle; printed by permission of Perdita Schaffner.

4. 'The Dark Room,'' presented by Susan Stanford Friedman and myself, *Montemora* 8 (1981), 57-76, including H.D.'s notes to this chapter. All H.D.'s notes are unpublished by New Directions.

5. H.D. ''The Dream,'' [Chapter 3] in *Contemporary Literature* 10, 4 (Autumn 1969), 606. This is the other source of a complete chapter of *The Gift*.

6. Perdita Schaffner's work offers irreplaceable insights. ''Merano, 1962,'' *Paideuma* 4, No. 2/3 (Fall/Winter 1975); ''The Egyptian Cat,'' in H.D., *Hedylus* (Redding Ridge, CT.: Black Swan Books, 1980); ''Pandora's Box,'' in H.D., *HERmione* (New York: New Directions, 1981); ''A Profound Animal,'' in H.D., *Bid Me to Live* (Redding Ridge, CT.: Black Swan Books, 1983); ''Unless a Bomb Falls . . . ,'' in H.D., *The Gift* (New Directions, 1982). Her comments occur in the last mentioned, p. XIV.

7. In a personal letter to the author, September 8, 1983.

RACHEL BLAU DuPLESSIS

Allegories of the Gaze

The writing of Victor Segalen (1878-1919) is known to American readers primarily through Nathaniel Tarn's translation (Unicorn Press, 1969) of selected *Stelae* and J.A. Underwood's virtually unobtainable English version of *René Leys* (O'Hara, 1974). Segalen traveled widely in Oceania and China between 1902 and 1918, living for extended periods in Peking. His work (poetry, essays, novels, scholarship) reveals a radically ethnographic (Segalen would say ''exoticist'') subjectivity: consciousness endlessly caught in a search for difference. His writing does not offer up Loti's composed scenes of the exotic, nor does it aim for an eloquent Claudelian ''connaissance de l'est.'' Only his first book (*Les Immémoriaux*, an ethnographic novel about the destruction of traditional culture in Tahiti) seeks to render the authentic life of another society. Rather, Segalen is preoccupied with *encountering* difference in an interplay that displaces and allegorizes the self. His *Stelae* are personal expressions cast in the distant voice of imperial Chinese inscriptions. *René Leys*, perhaps Segalen's masterpiece, is a parody of a mystery novel centered on Peking's Forbidden City. In fact it is a profound meditation on the (impossible) desire to penetrate another's secrets—secrets we come to see as *constituted* by this very desire.

Segalen's travel accounts (*Briques et tuiles* and *Equipée*, now republished in France and begging for English translation) give us a "China" of fissures, alternations, diversities. The traveller moves among China's signs (sites and encounters) without according the other a permanent outline or bringing to expression its latent "meanings," without describing or evoking. Concrete experiences of difference are rendered as parables, vignettes, prose-poems, with each encounter an occasion for allegoresis—the release of multiple meanings by the interpreting, desiring voyager (reader). Segalen the scholar "knew" China rather well, but he declined to deliver an authoritative *savoir*. He wanted something more complex than a representation. In his unfinished *Essai sur l'exotisme: une esthetique du divers* (Fata Morgana, 1978) he urges the true exoticist to "dire, non pas tout crûment sa vision, mais par un *transfert* instantané, constant, l'écho de sa présence." Like a great many modern writers Segalen finds nourishment in exotic sources. But what distinguishes his work is its attention to the poesis in which self and other are located: the subjective transfers and alternations, the constant struggle of imagination and reality, the unsettling processes of domination, desire, distantiation, fascination, projection.

Three short translations can give only a hint of Segalen's cross-cultural poetics. They are drawn from *Peintures*, a sequence of prose-poems republished last year by Gallimard. The book is a guided tour among imagined paintings: Chinese portraits, landscapes, historical and dynastic scenes. This *imaginaire* is "painted" on silk, wool, paper, porcelain, air and water. A long central poem unrolls like a great scroll, evoking a brilliant cortege of gifts and trophies, winding across multiple landscapes, bringing together the varied regions and things of China, to be accepted or rejected, tasted ("without mixing") by the Emperor. Segalen's China is indeterminately one and many, always coming together, dispersing. Frequently a face or gaze gathers, to confront us. . . .

I

The Painting that comes next isn't one that hangs high up, but is to be opened with a touch of thumb and index, like the half-moon fan carried in Autumn and Spring . . . and actually it's called:

FLYING FAN

Don't give it any rest: don't try to inspect it laid out flat, or count the ivory inlays; but give it movement, always; stroke the air and secretly, out of the corner of an eye, look into each gentle breath it sends, bit by bit guess at the furtive scenes: the background, black and shining. Suddenly a battlement

opens: wings beat: big eyes roll: a skull caves in: out comes a pagoda, with a single spurt spreading to the open sky . . .

Did you see it? Fan, keep fanning.

A figure composes itself: a naked monk, ecstatic. Just two eyes are left of his entire body, but they're very much alive. (The rest is dry or rotted.) He lets us know that what's seen, alone, is good. Fan, keep fanning . . .

Now a wide open face stares at you; so magically and deeply that it will fix itself to your features and may become *your face* if you don't, still fanning, change it to something else less questioning: the curved stroke of a Painter's horizon; the vast undulation of the sea; slow wing-beat of the great rose goose in the sky; the gathered, stripped, spare caress of every desire . . . Fan, keep fanning . . .

But the painted face evokes itself again, with insolence, clearer at every turn. It gazes from too close. What can it mean? Are you provoking it? Met anywhere else: what an intolerable experience! Like the appearance of an overly-insistent friend, like a too-faithful regret, like a mute wanting to ask a question.

But we don't inhabit the true world. We can reject what offends or troubles us, effaced more easily than a regret, with a quick flick of the hand.

So close up your fingers: at once, the face is gone. . . (*Peintures*, 34-36)

II

OF SILENCE

With violent battles, glare, tumultuous brush strokes, spattered ink, some have tried to simulate great noise. This one shows only silence. —It's a woman, eyes set and lusterless, eyes mute: a delicate, trembling face, immobile. —No words on this lip . . . and even, even her breath doesn't appear like some distant melody, or a mist whistling in the air. —Far and wide, soldiers with naked blades search all corners of the palace. —Immobile, the woman doesn't stir, or breathe; and by the steadyness of her breast you can see that even her heart doesn't beat. —She's seated, *half-clothed*, beside her great imperial cloak, dropped next to her and forming its own heap of air and silence . . . Nothing moves, nothing cries, nothing wails: the soldiers keep looking; and moving farther off their footsteps are smothered. Not a sound. Is nothing really heard here?

Ah! But this woman has magical power. Picking up the newborn child of the Heavens in her arms, the one they're looking to kill, she warned it thus: "If you're the true race of Tchao! If it's to live on: don't cry!" —and covered it with her negligent cloak . . .

And as long as they're here, as long as you look—believe me, you'll hear nothing. (*Peintures* 225-226)

III

What follows is another

REFLECTION IN THE EYES

of a girl, plainly;—this hair style, this carriage! Even these eyes looking straight at you and me . . . or perhaps over our shoulders into the space behind? (Don't turn around.)

This face reveals no emotion. The delicate brow is smooth; the eyebrows sedately arched; the lids don't blink; the wrinkles of the nose don't wrinkle; nor are the lips pursed or open . . . Look again: this chaste curve of the shoulders, and the hands clasped around the stomach from decency and a good education, as if for a bow she's about to make, or to hide an encumbering pregnancy. All in all, a great purity.

Still, you'd like to know what vision or turn of mind gives her whole young body this discreet demeanor . . .

Very well! Look her straight in the eyes, as she seems to be doing to us. If the Painter is equal to the masters (to the one who enclosed in the pupil of a cowherd the perfect image of a cow, with spots, hide and halter) if the Painter has been skilled and clever, the REFLECTION IN THE EYES should contain everything they see or dream. So gaze into them, from very close . . .

Oh—this minute mirage, marvelous and magically enclosed in the shining little shield! According to the commentary, we discern "two girls, naked from breast to foot, one on the knees of the other who cradles and caresses her." (We can even distinguish the tips of the fingers!) What integrity in the Painter's craft! So this is the scene the pure face reflects, decently contemplates.

But the eyes are still riveted to our own. So what's the source of the reflection?

Our *own* eyes? The space behind us? (*Peintures*, 41-43)

Addenda:

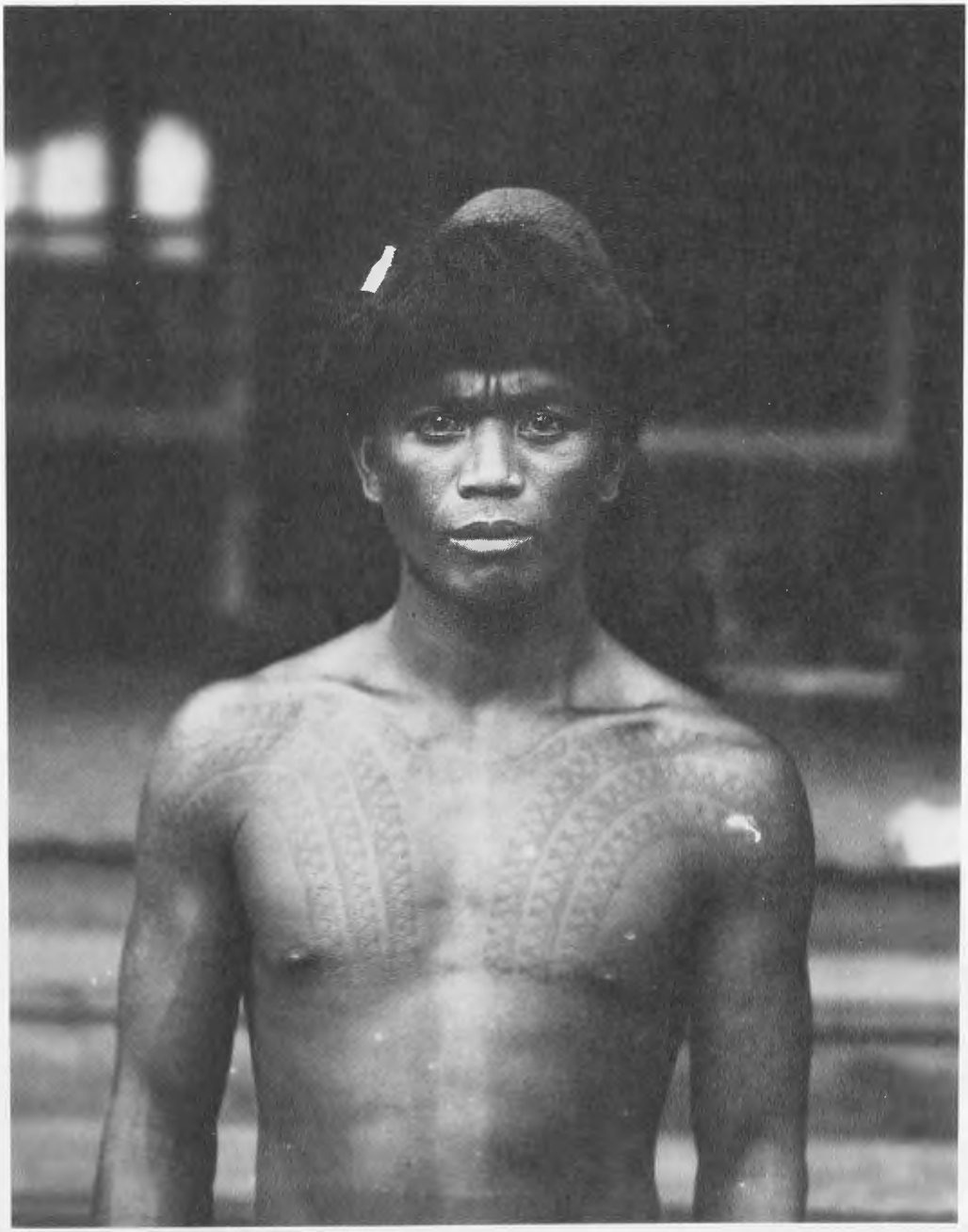
1) Segalen's China never stays other for long. Nor does it become familiar. Looking, our gaze is *implicated* in the displacements and allegories of an ethnographic desire.

"Reflection in the Eyes" ends with a very precise uncertainty. Do we see in the masklike face something of our own psyche projected, its "deep" desires, an unconscious revealed? Or do we discern a reality occulted in the simple gesture of turning toward this particular face, the act of *positioning* a subject? Understood psychologically, the painting is a personal discovery of repressed feelings about sexuality. But the other possibility we're left with suggests something slightly, but importantly, different. Rather than revealing an unconscious truth the painting shows what reality must be located "behind" the self in the trope of consciousness toward this specific other. By imagining here a mysterious woman (a feminizing of the other found everywhere in Western writing, including Segalen's) the exoticist turns away from a possibility of Lesbian eroticism. Discovered as a reflection in the other's eyes, this reality confuses a dominant heterosexual category: woman positioned as opposite sex, object of desire.

2) Last summer, while doing archival research on the history of ethnographic photographs, I found in a file a face that stuck like "an overly-insistent friend, like a too-faithful regret, like a mute wanting to ask a question." No amount of flipping through other files—countless images of Indians, Africans, Melanesians, Eskimos—could fan this face away. Nor could I penetrate its fixed, eloquent silence. What was glimpsed in the gaze? I pass the question on to readers of *Sulfur*.

The archive's caption records an "Igorot Man" (brought from the Philippine Highlands to be exhibited at the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis). If we look intimately into this face, what disturbances appear behind (don't turn around)?

JAMES CLIFFORD



Igorot Man, Philippines

The Maximus Poems
CHARLES OLSON
ed. George Butterick
University of California Press, 1983.

Mallarmé is the author of a statement to which there have been varying reactions, including praise and blame, and which I shall repeat here as one of the more audacious propositions of the nineteenth century: "all earthly existence must ultimately be contained in a book." The book that Mallarmé projects is not so much a book of words as a book of relationships. In it one may read "with the eyes of the divinity" of a world utterly divorced from the present. The book, "as a Spiritual Instrument," may contain all earthly existence because it is freed of any obligation to refer to it at all. Instead, it may allude, invoke and suggest where other forms of literature (the newspaper is Mallarmé's example) are condemned to represent. Mallarmé is the supreme modernist text: written by no author, subservient to no audience, contingent upon no history. It is a monument to its own effacement.

I think of Mallarmé's (absent) *Livre* as I look at Charles Olson's *The Maximus Poems*, now gathered together into a single volume, possessed of a size and weight of other books (*The Divine Comedy*, The Bible, The OED) that could be said to contain at least a modicum of "earthly existence." At one level, *The Maximus Poems* proposes a similar comprehensiveness, posing no less than the Pleistocene as its inaugural historical border and the planet as its province. Its sheer physical bulk (8½x11x2) replicates its scope, if not its author's size. Yet much of what occurs in this big book does so by fragmentary means. Poems are made out of tesserated bits of chronicle, legend and personal history. Lines break unevenly, parentheses remain open, ideas switch gears mid-sentence. The poem is as time-bound, material and contingent as Mallarmé's is eternal. "Earthly existence" for Olson means physical existence, contained in the poem only by being a force within the world, engaging its various energies as projected through a single intelligence.

I bring together these radically different propositions of the book in order to indicate the enormous shift between the monumental, modernist text and the fragmentary, postmodern text—a shift that *The Maximus Poems* in its com-

plete version makes all the more recognizable. For Olson, the idea of a book-length poem is directly connected to a curriculum and practice of history for which the reader must relinquish a passive interpretive role and become an archaeologist among undecoded glyphs. The page is no longer the site of silent meditation; instead, it is a map of emotional and physiological intensities. It bristles with admonitions, citations and queries that, on the one hand, embody the poet's own acts of mind and voice and, on the other urge participation in the terms of his concern. Pound had advanced the idea of a long, historically critical poem in *The Cantos* but reified much of his critique by relying on the authority of timeless cultural models. Olson endorses the methodology of *The Cantos*, to be sure, but insists on the active intervention of the subject in transforming the historical record. Pound's "luminous moments" lift history from the quotidean and provide it with a vertical dimension; Olson's archival quotation and sources generate and project history forward by their metonymic relation to each other and by their tenuous relation to any overall scheme.

* * *

America's first story, as Olson will tell us often in the poem, was "fish," not religious freedom, fear of taxation or the desire for democratic institutions. And if cod was the mythos, displacement was its ethos as mercantile interests gradually removed the worker from the fruits of his labor. Olson figures this displacement in the removal of the "Company House" built by the original Dorchester Company from Stage Head to Salem to serve as the first governor's house: "It sat/where my own house has been (where I am/founded . . . ." From this point on, American life was to be a series of removals of man from what is most familiar: his place, his voice, his means of production, his language. The latter is, of course, the source for much of Olson's concerns, both in and out of the Maximus series. Words have been used cheaply by literary types who sentimentalize place (Vincent Ferrini in "Letter 5" is the most famous example) and more profoundly by the "musickracket of all ownership" that has permeated all aspects of public life. Olson's first volume is an elegy for lost sensation, for our ability to touch the world. He celebrates the dripping of a leaky faucet or the "beloved" pungency of the nasturtium since they are reminders of our lost tactile relation to nature.

Olson offers to restore some of the balance by pointing to hardy first-comers to the nation, the early Dorchester fishermen who weathered the difficult New England winters to set up a settlement on Cape Ann, America's first "polis."

But Olson equally respects the historians whose variable, shifting record is the source for his poem: John J. Babson, Frances Rose-Troup, John Smith, Captain Christopher Levett and others. But the central historian for the series is Herodotus whose defintion of history, "to find out for oneself," stands as the principle underlying all of Olson's endeavor. We see the poet finding out for himself throughout the poem, digging around in the archives, cryptically acknowledging his sources and carrying on an earnest debate with himself and his sources: "It goes to show you." "I don't mean, just like that, to put down/ the Widow Babson . . ." "North? Mud." The poem continually oscillates between the historical record, often at its barest and most fragmentary, and the personal. As Olson says in "The Librarian" (not part of the series but perhaps the best introduction to it) "I am caught/ / in Gloucester," a product of its materials and history and yet an agent in its transformation. This is as much Olson's heritage as it was that of the Dorchester Company who first "touched" and forever altered the New England coast. And when Olson finds discrepencies in the historical record, he "corrects" himself within the poem (as in "Maximus to Gloucester, Letter 15"), not only to set the record straight but to foreground his own participation in the act of history writing.

What Olson learned in Book I is not only that Gloucester is as the nation is but that the nation is rapidly becoming as the rest of the planet will be. Hence, he opens his concerns in later books to the "West" in its broadest sense. The best indicator of this global shift can be graphically seen by comparing the covers to the first two volumes. Volume I presents a geodetic survey map of Gloucester harbor; Volume II (formerly called IV, V, VI) goes back 125 million years to the combined continents of Africa, North America and Asia, known as Gondwanaland, before "Earth started to come apart." Where Book I engaged modern history and a relatively limited locale, Book II expands Olson's horizons, both historically and spatially. His concerns turn increasingly toward mythological materials drawn from Greek, Norse, Sumerian, Egyptian and other ancient sources. At the same time that he goes back in time, he goes further inward to psychological dimension, informed by his expanding interest in Jung. His concern seems to be less the nature of "polis" as concrete individuals and more the nature of "earth" as archetype. Much of the lore of the second volume, then, is derived from texts in which the nature of consciousness is given mythopoeic form. Hesiod's *Theogony* is reworked in terms of a Dogtown legend concerning the death of Merry, "the handsome sailor" by his bull; a Hittite legend, "The Song of Ullikummi" provides Olson with a felicitous image of the earth's growth principle in the form of the "diorite stone"; from Jung's writings on alchemy, Olson discovers the "Black Chrysanthemum" that

serves in later poems to embody the irreducible nature of things; from Henri Corbin's "Cyclical Time in Mazdaism and Ismailism," Olson derives his version of the cosmic man, the *homo maximus*, who creates paradise in himself. All of these mythological sources represent the poet's attempt to forge his own version of the *Civitas Dei* beyond Gloucester in the history of man's fictions and representations.

This move outward from Gloucester to the prehistoric past or inward to the prerational mind is no doubt an inevitable result of Olson's method, but I find this shift from the local, historical investigations of Book I to the timeless, mythological present of Jung to be one of the unfortunate changes in the later poems. What propels the early Maximus series is Olson's solid critique of mercantile society as viewed through specific individuals and events. The later poems continue to focus on specifics, but their historicity is sub-sumed by their participation in cyclic or repeatable patterns. On the other hand, Olson's formal presentation becomes more varied as he attempts to register the size and range of his expanding territory. Many of the poems resemble marginal notes or epigrams on sources now lost. At one point, we come upon the following, set in the middle of an otherwise blank page: "128 a mole/to get at Tyre." Butterick's *Guide to The Maximus Poems* explains that "128" refers to the highway that crosses the Annisquam River by a bridge (a mole?) and that like Gloucester, the Phoenicean city of Tyre was similarly linked to the mainland by means of a causeway, built by Alexander in order to capture ("get at") the town. Thus contemporary Gloucester and Alexandrian Tyre are collapsed in the briefest of all bridges, a poetic couplet set in the midst of a vast, white emptiness.

The ephemerality and fragmentary nature of the poems are even more in evidence in Book III where Olson re-emerges as citizen of Gloucester, the Maximus persona having been dropped (or at least diminished) along the way:

> Said Mrs. Tarantino,
>
> . . . . . .
>
> You have a long nose, meaning
> You stick it into every other person's
> business, do you not? And I couldn't
> say anything
> but that I
> do.
>
> p. 378

Olson no longer rallies his citizens to dig in and combat the forces of encroaching pejorocracy; he no longer charts the outer domains of the planet or the inner domains of mythic consciousness. He attempts "to write a Republic / in gloom on Watch-House Point," realizing the grim shape the nation has assumed. As for Man. Olson's dismissal is quick: "ugh, a species / acquiring / distaste / for itself." And although he continues his researches into the ancient past, his focus is more on the nature of existence—his existence, as a solitary individual:

> Nasturtium
> is still my flower but I am a poet
> who now more thinks than writes, my
> nose-gay.

One might feel that the brokenness of the final volume represents a failure of vision, a loss of the poem's purpose—but what had the poem proposed in the first place if not to incur the ramifications of its own materials? Before Olson had ever started *The Maximus Poems*, he realized that the "stance toward reality outside a poem" depended upon hewing close to the materials at hand: "But if he stays inside himself, if he is contained within his nature as he is participant in the larger force, he will be able to listen, and his listening through himself will give him secrets objects share." Thus the conclusion to his great series trails off with a series of fragments—"moles" to attach a city to the nation or a single man's perception to the potential in any of us yet to see Paradise.

* * *

Such incompletion would seem to violate the very idea of a "definitive, textual edition" of the sort that George Butterick has amassed, and no doubt the very fragmentary quality of Olson's working habits made the task of editing a dubious pleasure. Butterick attests to the difficulties of piecing together the third volume, published with Charles Boer in 1975 by Viking/Grossman out of the detritus of Olson's papers following the poet's death. Poem's written on paper bags or envelopes, poems whose lines swirl around the page or dribble off the end onto some other page, poems published in magazines with errors of spelling and lineation, poems erroneously labelled, poems retrieved from letters and, most difficult of all, poems written in Olson's illegible scribble—this was the midden out of which volume three was reconstructed. The University of California edition reflects a complete re-editing of this as well as of the first two volumes, based on the poet's manuscripts and on corrected copies of

previously published versions. In the process, George Butterick has advanced the technology of textual editing by many years, establishing new criteria around which a text may be considered as such at the same time that he observes the rigorous principles established by the Modern Language Association's Center for Scholarly Editions.

Were it simply a matter of collecting Olson's poems published over a lifetime into a collected poems, Butterick's job would have been much simpler. *The Maximus Poems*, however, was a single poem, unpublished in its entirity at the time of the poet's death. There was no "ur-plan" for its final ordering, no guide as to what constitutes a "maximus" poem (unless labelled as such) and no plan for its chronology. In many cases the editor's only clue as to the poem's place in the sequence was its inclusion in a live reading preserved on phonotape. Personal conversations with Olson helped resuscitate proper printings, as in the case of "2nd Letter on Georges," originally conceived as two poems but printed, through an error, as a single poem in Volume I. And many of the poems in the later volumes are so fragmentary that only the most assiduous attention to context would identify them as parts of the series. As it is, twenty-nine new poems, many of them quite beautiful, have been added, one deleted and the entire corpus re-ordered.

The history as well as methodology of Butterick's textual editing may be read briefly in his afterword and more comprehensively in a separate volume on the entire project (including textual notes), *Editing the Maximus Poems* (University of Connecticut at Storrs Library). Outside of a list of textual variant for the Book III, printed at the end of the University of California volume, *The Maximus Poems* remains relatively free of cumbersome textual apparatus and thus asserts its position as Olson's and not the editor's volume. It is this discretion, however, that makes Butterick's editing all the more vital. I can think of few poets in history (Blake and Coleridge come to mind as exceptions) who have been served as well by an editor as Olson. Not only has George Butterick provided us with a definitive test, he has annotated the poems in his authoritative *Guide to the Maximus Poems*, indexed and organized Olson's estate at the University of Connecticut Library according to the most rigorous archival standards, published the most important portion of that archive through his journal, *Olson*, edited Olson's correspondence with Creeley and is now at work on editions of Olson's non-Maximus poems and his prose. Would that the rest of the modern tradition had had such care and attention.

The physical design of the book is quite handsome, making good use of

previous volumes to establish continuity. The covers of the earlier books have been used as section dividers, and in the case of Volume I, with its map of Gloucester harbor, the poem's title has been reduced in size so that more of the map may be seen. Happily, pagination has been added to Volume IV, V, VI for ease of reference. Pagination throughout occurs at the bottom of each page in an unobtrusive grey type with reference both to the earlier volume as well as to the consecutive series of the new volume. This strategy makes using Butterick's *Guide* all the easier since that volume is coded to the earlier books. The new edition has been photo-reproduced from earlier editions with appropriate corrections and emendations. Thus the typeface is now standardized throughout, and the incredibly small, cramped type of Volume I may now be given its proper relation to the Page. The only problem with this is that since the type of Volume I must be enlarged, it comes out slightly fuzzier or greyer than that of the other volumes.

For a poet who felt that *Space* was the central fact about America and who covered a substantial amount of space himself, it is no surprise that his life-work would be a big book. By a strange twist, however, that very weight and size itself seems to contradict one of the poem's important themes: that knowledge must be returned to its producer, that information must move off the page and into the world of its users. The University of California Press has made a great contribution to current literary history by giving us a definitive text of *The Maximus Poems*,* conceived around Olson's wishes as to scale and size, and one now anxiously awaits a paperback edition that will be slightly more portable, able to leave the library carrel and move among those readers who, over the years, have made up Olson's largest following.

* It should be pointed out that the publication of *The Maximus Poems* is part of an ongoing series of definitive editions of modern and postmodern work that the University of California Press is publishing. Along with Robert Creeley's *Collected Poems*, Louis Zukofsky's *A* and *Prepositions*, Cesar Vallejo's *Complete Posthumous Poems*, Paul Blackburn's *Proensa*, this series stands as one of the more significant publishing ventures of the past half-century, and certainly one of the most daring gestures on the part of a university press.

MICHAEL DAVIDSON

The Space of Half an Hour
KEITH WALDROP
Burning Deck Press, 1983
The Ruins of Providence
KEITH WALDROP
Copper Beach Press, 1983

Keith Waldrop has, in thses two volumes, a few moments. I'll quote one particularly memorable one from *The Ruins of Providence*.

When once the earth is gone,
God will separate
light from heat,

reserving
the heat for those in hell

and for his saints the
cold light of
love eternal, Within otherwise

'normal' scales, we
are allowed shades.

The title of the other book, *The Space of Half an Hour*, embodies an intriguing contradiction: that time and space both are and are not comprehensible, containable, real. The first poem in the book, "poem from memory," portrays a man lost in time and space, unable to grasp or verify his position. It is potentially volatile material. But, it refuses to commit itself, to come forth. The poem begins,

If one
smokes, there
is the burnt
match, the
butt,
the ashes. There are
crusts, crumbs, spit

out pits. There
is body.

This may contain some poetic potential. If it does, the poem never realizes that potential, but merely moves along apace, accreting such truisms, one after another. And, in the end, so what? Yes, if one smokes, there *is* the burnt match, the butt, the ashes. And then we, the readers want to ask, "well, poet, so what? Can you make something of that?" But the poet does not make anything of it, as he did in the brief section I quoted at the outset. Instead, rather than poetry, Mr. Waldrop weaves a loose fabric of mini-discourse, rambling, sophomoric, and unrealized. He gives language to us in telegraphic form, clipped, quick phrases from a sender who has not time to make sense out of his own message. Hence, the poems are composed of undigested truisms, such as "Associations/are not free," or "Geographical, we/extend into the cosmic," or "Rhythm is stifled by time," or "My dreams are experimental."

Yet worse, the opening lines of this poem ("If one/smokes, there") disturb me by their impersonality, by their *refusal* to be particular, committed, to use real things from real life, to create, or recreate, anything palpable. "One" smokes. "There is." "There are." and most awful, "There is body." Is this some vision of life as utterly disembodied, robotic, disconnected? If it is, let us have the poet's human reaction in the midst of it, or it is useless mockery. That human reaction is the only thing which can ground this kind of poetry, and it is desperately lacking.

"Action a kind of/image," Mr. Waldrop says, opening the second long poem, "the chances of magic." Yet, if he finds action as a form of image, I find it strange that the book contains an enormous preponderance of passive verbs, a paltry few active ones. Image (imagination) creates art. Without it we come adrift into the self-referential world of only thought. Turning to the opening lines of the third, and final, long poem in the book, "elegy," I disagree wholeheartedly with Mr. Waldrop's solipcistic lines:

This body, mine, is only
an image of my brain . . .

This not only makes an excessively reductionist philosophical statement, it is wrong. Moreover, and more problematical, it leads us nowhere poetically. If our bodies, and hence all life, is but an image of our minds, then all we have to write about, think about, deal with, are our own minds. Mr. Waldrop's im-

pulse here goes not only contrary to what I believe, but it goes in the opposite direction of what poetry believes: that the world is palpable, real, and present.

Hence, when Mr. Waldrop wants to talk about terror, as he does in the ninth section of the second poem, "the chances of magic," he contemplates "someone" he thinks about who has died. Again, though, impersonally, for what is important is not that person, nor death, but Mr. Waldrop's "mind" of which it is all an image: "No doubt/someone I am thinking of is/dead . . ." As he contemplates this fact, this "no doubt" nameless, faceless death, he ends this section thus: "This is/a moment for terror." Such poetry must tell us that, for it cannot engage terror. The poet steps back from the poem, disengages from the life, and gives us, not the sense of terror, not the human beauty or horror of terror, but a statement, a proposition. Each line, each poem, is about the same thing, the poet's thought.

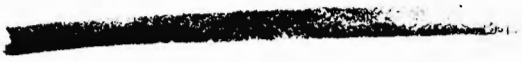
The Ruins of Providence is a better book than *The Space of Half an Hour*, because at times it escapes the intellectualized, philosophical obsession to make grand, enduring truths, to engrave repeatable lines (self-evident truths, or, to save them from that, the mocking of self-evident truths) into our culture. When the poems descend from those heights, they can be affecting, interesting, real. "A Ceremony In Woods Hole," an elegy, ends with the participants carrying a drowned body "past the Fishmonger to scatter it/on closer waters." These lines give us life-and-death, these lines *are* life and death. *The Ruins of Providence* leans back and forth, one way then the other in style, towards the more prevelant quick-shot one-liner, often too clever, and back towards lines more naturally developed, formed by the poet's breath and thought together, by the meaning and development of the poem, rather than by a technician reading a code book.

The last poem of this book "The Master of the Providence Crucifixion," attempts the most ambitious project of the two volumes. It is a prose piece, presumably about the Master whose painting graces this book's cover, the Master of the Providence Crucifixion who lived in Utrecht in the mid-fifteenth century. But, by conversion, the character of the poem becomes a modern person, alter-ego to the poet, wandering the streets of Providence, Rhode Island, contemplating occasionally the city, but most often his own meditations on being and nothingness. This intriguing project, despite some interesting moments, fails in the vein of the two books' major fault: abstraction, intellectualization, vague fabrication of lives and things which ought to be near, real, present. Instead, they fade, as, he says, do dream images, "so fast."

The Master, the other modern "he," and the poet (once in the piece the figure says "*my* head") knows "without deliberation, how to get across Providence. It is only thought he is lost in." Of course, Providence is both earthly and divine, and it is then "only thought" which complicates either crossing. The same holds for the prose poem: thought, thought thinking about thought, thought turning on thought, thought examining thought, prevents crossing the poem.

"He would like to keep things at a distance," Mr. Waldrop writes of his man in Providence, "within his senses, so as to keep them present." I think that's a mistaken notion of the motive for keeping things at a distance, I think it's too complex and "poetic" and justified a reason. Nonetheless, in so doing, in keeping things at a distance, the poem keeps us at a distance, offers morsels which tempt us to go on, but gives us, finally, no bridge on which to cross over.

MARTIN NAKELL



Parts and Other Parts
CHARLES STEIN
Station Hill Press, 1982.

There are very few poets in America worth trusting word for word, poets in whose work nothing is done for effect. Charles Stein is one of the few. The austerities in his poems are never tempered for the sake of the reader, just as his humor is never stressed, but is there to be experienced as part of the work's innate subtlety. This makes it possible, in the act of reading, to find firm footing in really undiscovered territory. If a native Buddhist poetry is every recognized as originating in America, Stein's work will be rudder, mast, galley, captain and cook all in one. (Gary Snyder's work, by contrast, does not originate here but in the East: its referentiality displays its derivations readily enough, but it is not "original" in the sense I am suggesting for Charles Stein.) This is due to his *practice* which, as a poet, extends further than the act of writing poems. Stein is one in whom the phrase "presence of mind" has an obvious relevance.

Reading his work, one feels literally in the presence of *mind*, without the annoyance of an interceding personality. Not that the poems are without *character*—for this is an inevitable consequence of materiality, per se—but Stein is a poet who has been for some time now willing to radically submerge the identity proposed by his name with the object that name specifies (auf deutsch: *stone*).

Parts and Other Parts: the title verifies the principle. Similitude is not echo. The beautiful, haunting photographs by the author throughout the book deepen and fuck with the poems—there is no other term—yet they never reflect or echo the poem's "content." The recognition here is that such content cannot be reflected or described; there can only be something further placed in relation *to* it.

Mind is a kind of third sex, as there are *parts* and other *parts*. And there is parting—a cleaving, a separating out, a distinction from which issues a confluence of parts, as "the twisting fish in the pool exchange locations." (p. 46) Not change—notice—but *ex*change: "a lawless profusion at the uncentered center of order" (p. 26) creates a turbulance. What issues, as in any act of the mind, is a further resolve (as colors blended are said to be resolved):

> A later iconography indicates all *as* change.
>
> Fiery darts leap up from the raging bull.
> Little persons are trampled or devoured.
> Disgusting mutilations, excrement, tendons,
> sinews stretch and creak.
> The eternal images set but to abuse or disabuse.
>
> We want to be like stone.
>
> To believe the apparencies
> which are *not*
> change.
>
> p. 22

The first section of the book is "A Book of Confusions," consisting of poems which are acts of reportage about a heap of debris, a pile of diverse objects which in acts of meditation become fulminating reservoirs of potential. As in medieval art the literal and the figurative meanings constitute a single respiration. The poems are the audible breathing, the thin flicker of air escaping out of the intent body.

The second section, called "Parts," is just that: pieces attached to other pieces.

Powerful acts of prosody animate a never depleted sense of the *impending:*

> He stands on the brink.
> He rotates a crank.
>
> p. 44

This section is closest of the three to Stein's earlier work in *Witch Hazel.* And here I should caution the reader that *Parts and Other Parts* is not a "new" book: the poems date from 1973-75, so they fit chronologically between the previously published books *Witch Hazel* and *Horse Sacrifice*. It is unfortunate that Stein's books have been published so long after their composition. But this makes their power all the more apparent, as not a line or phrase dates the poems in any way. They rise up on singular stalks of their own integral nature.

> I apologize to the tall forest.
> Green tall trees lean down upbraiding me
> because I am a stone. I am sorry
> that I am a stone
> I am trying
> the best I can
> to melt down utterly.
>
> p. 82

The apology is a moment of natural empathy—the hard and squat reaching out to the tall and willowy—filled with humor and grace. Among poets all those lean trees can only look down on the stone with envy for its compactness and absolute identity with its own utility. The passage above is from the final section of *Parts and Other Parts*, the long poem "Point Sphinx." The poem rises out of the most compact conditions imaginable—the repetition of the same phrase with variations so slight they might serve as a harrowing test in a language class—and rises up to experiment on itself in an epiphany of new images and modes, a glossolallia of tones.

"Point Sphinx" leaps off properly into the unparalleled sequence of long poems in *Horse Sacrifice*. *Parts and Other Parts* fills in a vital link, making visible at last with Stein's previously published books a broad section of his springboard. There are still the past six or seven years' work undocumented in books, and one would hope that Stein's vital work will be brought up to the present somehow and kept pace with after that, for in the long run he will be seen as inevitable an element of American poetry as oxygen.

JED RASULA

Defenestration of Prague
SUSAN HOWE
Kulchur, 1983.

The historical "defenestration of Prague" refers to the somewhat parodic catalyst of the Thirty Years' Wars between the Protestants and the Catholics in Germany during the 1600's; specifically, throwing some Bohemian officials out of the windows of the Prague palace—who are said to have landed in a heap of dung. Susan Howe's *Defenestration of Prague* pays no visible attention to this event; if one were to locate her book in a city, for example, it would have to be Dublin, not Prague. The title of her book does not function as a *specific* index of the book, but rather as an oblique sign of the book's concerns; thus, it takes us to the past, to the exotic, to the absurd, and to the struggle between the Protestants and the Catholics which haunts Ireland to this day.

The book is divided into two sections, "Defenestration of Prague" and "The Liberties," and each section is further sub-divided into groups of poems that cohere formally and thematically. Formally, the book is quite diverse: sometimes the poems are scattered across the page, sometimes arranged in neat one and two line stanzas, elsewhere blocked into square monuments. But then the opening part of "The Liberties" is a straightforward prose account of the relationship between Jonathan Swift and Hester Johnson (Stella), and the fifth section, "God's Spies," is a play. The book lacks the unity and development—the *containment*—of her previous book, *Pythagorean Silence*; the heterogeneity of *Defenestration of Prague* undermines, I think, the very concept of unity. It gives the impression rather of something lurking in the background, fragmented in the way that dreams are, full of signs of what cannot be told. However, Howe seems to want the book to be read as a whole, not as a collection of individual poems, and there *are* thematic preoccupations that reverberate in increasingly complex patterns. Thus, while the book is uneven in places, overall it is a compelling struggle with memory, truth, the feminine, Ireland.

The opening lines say much about both the formal preoccupations and the thematic ones:

> oblivious window of Quiet
> closing

egeiptes aegistes aegiptes egeps Egipp
egypt here there

Scotus (that is darkness)

forged history)slayius slamius stanius Monarch

greengrail mist-grey who
soundless parable possible Quiet to flame

p. 9

Despite the fragmentary nature of this section, the poem moves forward through repetition and a delicate torqueing of syntax—resulting in a sort of clotting. The window of oblivion, memory, and remembering quietly opens and closes on a kind of "forged history," a history that is either made—or made up. She evokes the distant past in a language which occasionally appears sharply out of the mist, but soundlessly. For memory is mute ("mute memory vagrant memory," she says later), and perhaps for this reason she is so interested in the *sound* of it:

sound sounde) of soun
amend unto
bowroughholder borrougolder borsolder bar
soldier burrow holder Him
bring into Awe
stranglerstragglers no
nightstealer

p. 15

The language falls apart or sticks together, becomes at times a "crumbling compulsion of syllables," elsewhere a "gnashing pattern of alliteration." But the language, with its vaguely archaic ring, is appropriate to its burden of memory.

This memory is in fact an "inward memory" projected out upon a host of mythological and historical characters, the most important of whom are Florimel (from Spenser's *Faerie Queene*), Stella (the long time friend of Jonathan Swift), and Shakespeare's Cordelia. Howe, for example, catches Florimel running through the forest:

A fictive realm
Words and meaning meet in

feigning

without a text and running from
true-seeming

Florimell flees away into the forest

Hide her there
an illusion (fiction)

Beauty of the world
becoming part of the forest

p. 27

Florimel is caught in a fictive realm, which is to say she is caught in language, where true and seeming meet. And Howe catches herself there as well:

no clock running
no clock in the forest

evanishing of the actors into
one another
Am in a simple allegory

Reaching out alone in words oh

peerless poesy

p. 28

She has momentarily retrieved those actors, hiding and revealing them in the words (in the "woods") until they vanish back into the time and timelessness ("no clock in the forest") of Spenser's "simple allegory." At the end, she is left out of the allegory, alone with or in the words of poetry.

That this remembering of herself in allegory is also a remembering of Ireland becomes clearer in the second section of the book, "The Liberties," whose dedication page (it is dedicated to Susan Manning) contains what appears to be a reproduction of an Irish postage stamp. Howe is, of course, of Irish descent and it is not so surprising to note how many of Howe's references are to that "Secret isle," to figures from both English and Irish history and mythology.

In this context, then, the second section constellates around Stella and Cordelia. What is remarkable about the "Book of Stella," however, is the seeming absence of Stella herself; instead the poems describe the churchyard, the countryside, the sea:

fearsad bell high stone wall
evensong
the blue of sweet salvation
such roads between the uplands
over the lowered cols
eden ēadan brow of a hill

p. 75

This section, which seems partially based on Swift material (perhaps on the *Journal to Stella*), reproduces the mystery of Stella's relationship with Swift. It does *not* seem interested in inventing the amorous desires of that couple and instead is more interested—both here and in the first section—in the meaning of chastity, in what it means to be a daughter, and, by implication, what it means to be or have a father:

The real plot was invisible
everything possible
was the attempt for the finest thing
was the attempt
him over the bridge into the water
her some sort of daughter
events now led to a region
returned in a fictional direction

p. 84

The father/daughter issue becomes more prominent in the "Book of Cordelia," where Lear's exile seems to prompt the section's concern with flux, anxiety, madness:

children of Lir
lear
whistling would in air ha
nameless appear—
Can you not see
arme armes
give tongue
are you silent o my swift
all coherence gone?

p. 91

The problem seems to be that if the father cannot speak, the daughter cannot remember, and so the section insists on the "no" of Lear's madness, the chaos of revolt and exile, murder. Inscribed in the text is again Howe's "inner mem-

ory,'' her appearance as ''Whowe'' where she and Lear's children are part of this ''stormstil stormstil / shuttle and whiz.''

It is as the daughters of a mad father that Stella and Cordelia seem to speak in the play, ''God's Spies.'' The dialogue is spare but not flat; the two characters complete each other's sentences, speak in echoes of Lear's sentences. This dialogue works eventually toward a confrontation between Stella and the ghost of Jonathan Swift, where Stella echoes Lear's ''Speak again,'' with the words ''Speak to me.'' The play, while formally most distinct from the rest of the book, recaptures thematic concerns of the whole book—the vagaries of memory, the invisible, the soundless, the lost.

For me the last section of the book is the most uneven; many of the poems' block-like structure and lack of syntactic connections slow the movement of reading. Some of these poems seem merely fragmentary, lists of words that do not invite the reader's participation in this archeology of memory. However, Howe eventually liberates these seemingly static moments:

> blood and water streaming land.
> swift to its close
> ebbs out
> out
> of
> my pierced side
> *not in my native land.*
>
> p. 121

The last line, the cry of many Irish writers who have chosen to work in exile, is the condition of Howe's desire to find origins, to remember a past which is beyond her. In creating the strange landscapes of her poems, the ''greengrail mist-grey'' fog out of which Castles Perilous emerge, she maps that inner exile of memory and genealogy, where she searches for the meaning of the father and the daughter, the mother land and the mother tongue:

> Inward memory
>
> Mystery passing myth sanctuary
>
> Secret isle and mortal father
> Shell half of my face
>
> Eden or ebb of the sea.
>
> p. 62

LORI CHAMBERLAIN

RASA or Knowledge of the Self
Essays on Indian Aesthetics &
Selected Sanskrit Studies
RENÉ DAUMAL
translated from the French by Louise Landes Levi
New Directions, 1982.

René Daumal is best known in this country as the author of an odd, haunting little book, *Mount Analogue*, that remained unfinished at the time of his death in 1944. It has grown into something of a cult book and sells by stacks out of the metaphysical bookstores. Another novel, *Le Grande Beuverie*, is more feverish and a great deal more humorous. It was issued about four years ago by Shambhala Publishers under the title *A Night of Serious Drinking*, but it will not become so popular because it lacks the mysterious transparencey of *Mt. Analogue*. Unfortunately Daumal's poetry remains relatively unavailable. Kenneth Rexroth, Armand Schwerner, and a few others have published translations of isolated poems, but no representative collection has appeared. With *RASA* the first collection of Daumal's essays becomes available.

During Europe's fervid period of modernism Daumal caried on a wary flirtation with the surrealists. A fascination with death as an adolescent prompted him to experiment with carbon tetrachloride, trying to bring himself as close as possible to a death-like condition while still fully conscious. The experiments confirmed his belief that a complete revaluation or revolution of consciousness could be provoked. This allied him to the surrealists, and Breton invited him to join their camp. But Daumal's fiercely mystical temperament drew him away from the strict political allegiances demanded by Breton. Non-rational states of mind suggested other directions to him, and the relief they cast on linguistic possibilities particularly intrigued him. He discovered in Oriental cultures a long experimental tradition probing the correspondences between language and inner, or visionary, modes of awareness. Dedicating himself to a sudy of Sanskrit, and the poetic and yogic systems stitched into the fabric of it, he founded a group of his own, Le Grand Jeu. It practiced what the members called *experimental metaphysics*.

Results of their excursions into language and consciousness emerge throughout Daumal's writings. These mark the first concerted effort by a European to fuse occidental literary practice with Sanskrit poetics. From several books of Daumal's prose, but primarily the collection *Bharata*, L.L. Levi has arranged an occasionally disjunct but always illuminating book in which Daumal addresses the twin Hindu arts of poetry and music.

There exists no linguistic architecture in the world comparable to Sanskrit. For the Hindus it is "their Pyramid, their Sphinx, their Ziggurat, their Parthenon," and exhibits a dizzyingly perfect construction. The same architectural exactitude characterizes Sanskrit poetics, to which grammar was considered an accessory science, along with phonetics, etymology, and metrics. Indian poets and critics drew on a spectrum of sciences, linguistic and psychological, in order to furnish their toolkits with precise instruments for the exploration of thought and emotion. The precision of these instruments, and the wholesale unavailability of some of them in America till now, make this book of interest.

> The artist is, above all, an artisan, whose task is *to make* certain objects according to certain laws and with a certain goal. First, of course, he must know the material with which he works. Therefore, the poetic art is founded on a science and doctrine of language usage.

To the Sanskrit poet heightened emotion provoked a heightened accuracy in the usage of language. And *rasa*, what Daumal calls "the essence of poetry," is the territory on which verbal expression and the pitches of emotional existence interact. Just as significant internal events demand a language that corresponds to them, the *rasa* theory assumes that a heightened employment of language will evoke a heightened, often visionary, suggestibility in an audience. Roots of this assumption go back to the *Rig Veda*, the earliest "anthology" of poetry intact in an Indo-European tongue.

Among the Vedic *rishis*—"seers" or poets—a mysterious intoxicant, personified and invoked under the name *Soma* dominates the poetry. Small wonder; *Soma* was the chemical source of the rishi's poetic vision. The poets glorified it, a liqueur carefully decocted from a plant known by the same name, as the agent of supernatural vision. Its identity has been in doubt for about three millennia. What is without doubt is that it delivered terrific psychotropic effects, and that over several hundred years it vanished from use. Either its harvestable source gave out or priests guarded its secret identity too zealously. Poets and visionaries gradually replaced it by a variety of disciplines, the yogas

that regulated physiological, linguistic, and mental functioning. But the concept of *Soma* seems to crop up again in classical times (Hindu era), etherealized and thinly disguised as *rasa*—the operating power of artistically charged language within a literary context. Daumal's own inquiries curiously parallel this unfolding. The poem, once a remarkable proof of altered vision becomes recognized as itself the instigator of transformed awareness. This transformation the poets called *rasa*.

> Savor (rasa) is the immediate interior perception of a moment or particular state of existence provoked by the functioning of the methods of artistic expression . . . (the rasas) are named, metaphorically, after the emotions or rather the psychophysiological operations of which they are the intuituve ideas: erotic, comic, pathetic, furious, herroic, horrific, repugnant, wondrous . . .
>
> . . . each (rasa) has its particular rhythms, prosodically expressed by the combinations and articulations.

In other words, poems by a deliberate methodology powerfully transform human consciousness; they arouse and regulate particular "moods" in us and convey information not ordinarily accessible; there are reasons why they do, and we can talk about these reasons without recourse to fuzzy metaphysical terms. Sanskrit poetics mapped out the terms of this discourse. The vocabulary alone should clear up a hundred vague discussions. What concerned the critics (who were themselves generally also the poets) was the poem's formal structure—its use of image, emotion, rhythm and figures of speech—and how that structure could interpenetrate with the private experiences of a reader to provoke *rasa*, what Daumal calls "an immediate experience, a gustation of life, a pure joy, which relishes its own essence as it communes with the 'other'—the poet or actor."

Daumal's intention in these essays was not to examine the particular rhythms or articulations by which Sanskrit achieved its ends. Methods of poetic craft vary from language to language, and it requires more than a nodding acquaintance with Sanskrit to benefit from the particulars of its prosody. But by drawing the parameters of this poetics and defining its salient terms Daumal has reintroduced some methods of looking at and talking about poetic practice. These are methods generally not attended to by politically neutralized criticisms which regard the human being and his society as "finished" or intact. Only the transformative effect of a poetry on its audience is of interest. The rest is packing material.

But it is not a distinction of the Sanskrit poets alone that they worked with the *rasas*. Any good poet does. You can pick examples from your own bookshelf. But the construction of a vocabulary that probes the relationship between language and emotion, and between poet and audience, is something no other tradition has accomplished with comparable exactitude. Daumal's *RASA* is the best available introduction.

It is a short book. It lays bare the bones and translates some seminal texts. Occasionally Daumal strikes a post of rather righteous intolerance—but remember, he was trying to explain lucidly during the 1930's the methods of Indian poetry and music. He had to do so in the face of uncomprehending critics on one side, and smog-producing Theosophists on the other. It required some fury to clear the air. A variety of scholarly works, especially badly written ones by contemporary Indian pandits, offer fuller views of the development and techniques of Sanskrit poetry. But this is the only one on Sanskrit poetics yet written by a practicing modern poet. There is nothing quaint or culturally restricted going on here. The propositions with which Daumal worked are as contemporary and compelling as poetry is.

ANDREW SCHELLING

On Sulfur's "Notes, Correspondence, Reviews"

The varied palette of *Sulfur*'s expanded review section inspires some comments of my own. First, while I agree almost entirely with Butterick's review of Rodefer's *Four Lectures*, I question that the poems present an "essentially optimistic view of the world." There are configurations to Rodefer's preoccupations that suggest otherwise. His "lectures" run on sheer culture-addiction, not unlike the way heroin swarms up through a Charlie Parker solo. There are elements to such "optimism" one would want to be cautious of. (A fuller exposition of this point can be read in my review of the book in *Poetics Journal* #3).

There are interesting conjunctions of reviewer and poet, and others that simply sink. Wakoski on Hejinian is one of the latter. How can she read *My Life* and *not* see the "story telling, image making, revelation of self" she professes to admire? She panics every time Hejinian's analytical mind tosses off an idea, and fears an impending invasion of European frontal lobes. Confusion reigns throughout Wakoski's review—and not only on the subject of Hejinian. She describes *The Maximus Poems* as leaning less heavily than *The Cantos* on Homer, in favor of American sources. Doesn't Wakoski know how much Hesiod, Apollodorus and other Greeks pervade Maximus? Didn't she ever get to the endless middle Cantos stuffed with authentic American history and documents? She pins her critique on a distinction between formalist European aesthetics and good ol' Amurkin gusto, allowing that her preference is for Bukowski over Ashbery, Williams over Eliot, and Levertov over Ammons. Ammons??—the loosest goose in all American homespun? She must not have opened that book either.

Aside from the fact that the name Caspar Weinberger kept slipping into my head while reading Eliot Weinberger's piece on poetry and Armageddon, I found it a marvellous precautionary assessment. One thing he overlooked, though, is the degree to which topicality in any form becomes a target for poetasters. When real poets take to penning mediocre poems for the unavoidable cause, mediocre talents everywhere are given a unique sanction. "Poetry" becomes a dump site for verbal toxic waste. From Pound forward—remember—the strongest warning of American poetics is that language can become radioactive, even through the best intentions. When poets ally themselves *as poets* with a cause, they're rarely so modest as to say, simply, "Here's my nutmeg against the end of the world." I seem to see Weinberger beginning with hesitations about the interaction of poetry with politics (pp. 157-158) and moving gradually to the position of wondering why poets aren't more politically involved. The shift is subtle, but the implication—especially by invoking Vietnam (p. 162)—is that both the antiwar movement and poetry as an art benefited by the cause. Everything in my experience—and everything Weinberger has said before that (including his essay on war poetry in *Sulfur* #4)—indicates otherwise.

JED RASULA

How to Nonread

What remains when you write nonreferential art poses the question invidiously, as when people call Gertrude Stein "art by subtraction." I'd rather ask what do the moderns—Bromige, Bernstein, Silliman, Hejinan—do that Stein does not; how much are we invited to a thirties table, objects, food and rooms that are reruns of the fun dinner with Apollinaire and Picasso for Duanier Rousseau. It's easy to dismiss the connection they seem to want to make to John Cage performance pieces, though both propose to alter a medium till it *becomes* an audience's expectations, and "play with that: though without the prop of established conventions. It's better to dismiss all that and appeal to a marginal public, perhaps like the one which collects newspaper headlines (there is a Brooklyn magazine called *Giants Play Well in the Drizzle*), or those (I'm one) given to saying a word out loud while walking, because we've thought of it and we like it.

Defense may be the wrong defense. Yet other writing appears, is good or bad and gets misjudged from how liking gets in the way of principles. Collected editions and reprints respond to tastes more settled. The definition of a "classic" is that it is well distributed. Language-oriented, nonreferential writing appears from Segue, Tuumba, small and smallish presses, and takes its chances on the fringes of the fringes. The presumption is that they like each other, keep up with innovations, and are fond of such horseplay as Charles Bernstein's rewriting Milton lines (in "Entitlement"), retaining nothing but line shape and syntax:

> These tribunes, if any pout, the sentence dormant
> Of florid Calm pesters daily
> Flouncing or with agile succession of mundanity
> Persue idle in that dented token.

There is a pleasure to seeing this done at all, and it is (I'd say) nothing like jazz transpositions, much less little quotes from other songs introduced as riffs. But this scrap is from quite a long piece, a set of pastoral arias for three "voices," I suppose syntaxes. And of course it isn't intelligible. I've read Bernstein books through, and he's most interesting to me verging on sense, but with a looser

notion of relevance, a sort of ultimately gelatine salad of associations, than is taught in College English. *That's* all right; we have traditions of nine-tenths unintelligible poems, from Blake's *Zoas* to *Houseboat Days*. But these writers aren't making French symbolist thickets. The words are more like mouthfuls of Lincoln logs (or crushed clam shells). They don't trip over casements into realms of psychic faery. It can have, even tends to have, no charm, not even the charm of instruction sheets from foreign industrialists.

Language is semisystematic, and leans very hard on expectations. There are some among nonreferentials who define their activity as political, as if meaning is a bourgeois taste—as opposed to the notorious abstractionism of bluecollar labor—or suspect because transmissibility is too like a transaction. Meaning becomes tainted commodity.

The question for me, as dogged reader who grew up with Christopher Morley pipe-and-slippers training, is whether any of the transformations "reading" undergoes given these texts is accessible to me. More broadly: what sense do these works make shelved in bulk in (say) a rare-book library? Or are we to think of them as tools, carried increasingly scuffed in the pockets of intelligent jeans, as backpackers used to stock Gary Snyder? This may be to think of the printed things as objects when we should be thinking of them as dial readings charting a process. A journal of imaginary physics could claim the same attention, and no more.

Of course I suspect that it's done by people who can't write well in the normal way, and it might be less than invidious to remark that these kinds of writing make it difficult to judge verbal skill. Ultimately their books of verse and stacked paragraphs *may* be taken as remarks about how writing is generated. Bernstein again:

> A fumbling derivation
> throttling without deviation
> through a tarred pocket with
> additional tutelage, up to the
> burned decks of a demoted
> desquamation.

(Burning Deck is the name of a small press.) Gertrude Stein wrote "A blind agitation is manly and uttermost," and a great many lines like that in *Tender Buttons* and *How to Write*. Ashbery's verse is much more sequential but without context; this is "reserved" as the cookbooks say, and I suppose thrown

out. Stein is even too musical, and has the virtues or uttered speech. Her recordings do sound like a Baltimore matron. Language-poet events are far from these graces, hardly texts (perhaps spray-painted on cement, like gang names on bridge abutments), and "reading" them often means finding a way to make them interesting at all, to recover them from dullness. Bernstein quotes Eigner's remark, "Nothing is too dull."

I am 18th-century trained; Pope is my idea of the first modern poet. He thought dullness the product of dunces. Here it's as if we wade through those awful would-be wits, with our mouths stopped by an "Oh well, we don't intend to be significant in those ways." Interest and interesting are replaced by attention. Lyn Hejinian did a piece lately about all the tables she knew; it skirted the danger of sounding too much like thirties experiment, but perhaps she was ashamed of its thematic unity. A theme piece will engage memory or some kind of persistent retrieval in ways which, as acts, are meaningful.

Swinburne is not a fun poet for me to read (neither is Shelley), because I find them meaningless and pretty, even if they're lisping of horrors. I'm tempted to say, of Shelley, that qualities without quantification are no damn good. The nonreferential poets (if a nonreferential, nonsymbolist poem is a poem) do raise reference as a problem, though their frequent suggestion that any reading for meaning is an automatism is a lie. Still, if one is to read them not own them reasons, even techniques, must be found, perhaps not to defend their texts as much as come up with a reason for their superiority to garment-district catalogues or lists of ingredients.

I have no one sample exhibit (Bernstein's poem about his father comes to mind), but the imagined exemplum I have in mind—it may be significant that an imagined one will do—is wandering through an area of experience known to the poet, which is a kind of limit, but the words and phrases substituting for each other, occuring spontaneously or taken from a text as cue list, are absolutely on a par, themselves experiences. Doing this very well, you'd think, would or should result in Stein or Joyce, but no room is left usually for an almost-caught meaning or consistently liquid, warbling phrase. It is perhaps too many negations, too puritan, saying the meanings I come to will be unexpected, nonsymbolist (not a nonverbal moment "caught"), and a byproduct of words and world considered as hostile systems. The reader is a kind of secret agent of letters, privileged in a way *not* to follow a text.

It isn't much of a fraternity, as the readers of Stevenson or Lamb shared a taste for *this* rendering of experience (or the experiences rendered). I can be a

Boswellian but not a Hejinianian or Sillimanite. One is not *grateful* for these texts the same way.

How wisdom creeps in is always a problem, and for these texts any marginal humanity. They are made, and the writers do seem different from each other. I love a writer with expertise, who knows something in a field or can *do* something like train lions. Experience too like other people's beats itself thin, like tapa cloth. Let the words *not* be from a thesaurus, yet unexpected. I *think* the reading is still too much changed to be called reading, but am willing to see the whole activity as marginally useful as say the scum on hot lead.

GERALD BURNS

Supplemental to "How to Nonread"

TO GERALD BURNS

17 October 1983
Dear Gerald,

Reading later tonight at St. Marks and jittering away a few minutes at the typewriter to actually get back to you in something like due speed.

I've made a copy of "How to Nonread" so am returning the copy you sent, as per your request. Seems as if you could basically make the argument you make without a couple of characterizations which strike me as misleading, at least from the point of view that I—and I think the others you mention—look at it. For one thing, 'nonreferential' is not really an accurate term; a point I've made in several texts, so maybe you just won't agree: I mean the words clearly have a reference—except in more visually-oriented work not discussed in your essay—and when you get to Silliman and much of Hejinian you actually have fairly standard descriptive and statemental sentences, though the order of them is not in keeping with normal narrative patterns. With me, the syntax is not grammatical or speech-derived but the words are still referential; I think you must mean something like nonrepresentation which is quite a different matter. Even if you take reference beyond the lexemic level, and talk—I think confusingly however—about the reference of phrases and sentences, then you get something like *poly*referentiality, the very opposite of the term you use. Also—I for one am *only* interested in meaning and its generation, inspection, prosody, etc.

Perhaps the meaning is not a predetermined Logos (though I surely make *references* to this vector of meaning as well) but an enacted one—you know the arguments of course—so I think if you want to talk about the nature of meaning enacted that's one thing, or the nature of the reference . . . but just to say 'not x' is reductive. If you didn't misuse these terms, you could make what would still be your criticism have considerably more relevance—and I think in fact you could make your criticism have considerably more force since it's hard to understand why one wd even bother abt writing that was uninteresting in reference or meaning—it would be of little interest to me either. I also don't quite see why you exempt Stein and Joyce from your censure, surely in some ways you must not, but that's a deeper issue, actually, than the other I raise . . . .

Charles

TO CHARLES BERNSTEIN

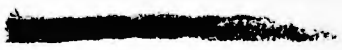
October 22, 1983
Dear Charles,

I knew, of course, you'd have a mass of theory. It seems to me in looking at the French you ignore the studies by Britons and Saul Kripke on reference. Our differences are territorial. Wittgenstein worries about more than misprision when he says "bank," meaning bank of the Seine, and you think he means Bank of England. That's a sensible way to get at *acts* of meaning by way of reference. Then there's the logical puzzles on referring, still going on, and Heidegger marveling that meaning (like anything) can be, or can be like anything, to be coarse. When you present, as art, a found syntax with artificial (semisystematic) substitution, or write sentences which are "sentences," frappés of less systematic word and concept substitution more like sidestepping, all that you say *may* be true and you *are* "making references" in a metaostensive way to more common speech acts. But polyreferentiality is useless to describe your written objects, which I do see as objects much more than the events you wish they were (is that wish built into them too, inside the structure, or added on like Wittgenstein's river bank?) because most newspapers, student themes and overheard conversation and advertisements, plus general utterances like "Life is hell," are polyreferential (and hence mostly boring). Bad art is polyreferential.

So context is, flatly, a directive to reference, That is what it's for. Dodgson uses unexpected remarks (seeming to or genuinely applying a context accompanied by a more recognizable *attitude*) and mock-words, sometimes nonce to jostle the narrative speaker-contexts he starts with (narrator + Alice as observer).

So I think it's misleading, especially after the perfectly well-known instances of surrealism, Dada etc., for you to say, blandly, that your words and phrases (for instance) "refer." In terms of established or evoked context of course they don't, and it seems to me what you're doing should be—even to be intelligible much less useful—described with context the operable term. You say, for instance, you don't see why Joyce and Stein are excluded from the motions I make, and context is why. Stein's mind is patently powerful, and even flitting from cute to cute she has an ongoing operation in mind which she finds (at least) interesting enough, and it shows. My favorite *all*-theory books by her are *Narration* and *Geographical History*. I guess the Joyce if any is *Ulysses* (and that's with most of the scholarship read and reread), though it's the *Wake* I glance at. She called him a mystery anyone could understand because his deformations ultimately make for texture rather than for meaning, but I think that's wrong tho' the last time I tried to take the *Wake* in bulk seriously I failed. And I've been rereading Sutherland's *Gertrude Stein: a biography of her work*, and just a little Allegra Stewart's *Gertrude Stein and the Present* (hers much less mindy than his, and I memorized Bridgman's *Gertrude Stein in Pieces*), and between them they can even make *Lucy Church Amiably* tolerable. The sound of Joyce and Stein is human and humane. Now "sound" in that sense will be several-sentence deployment, and a "tone" of "voice" maybe sometimes just a tiny bit like Carroll's sustained tone in *Snark*. It's just that tone your methods make impossible, and your methods make it impossible by destroying context as the *matrix* of reference.

Gerald Burns



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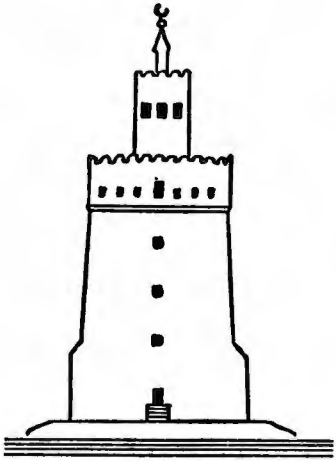

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